THE IMPERFECT IMPOSTOR

NORMAN VENNER

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By NORMAN VENNER

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To
JANE

THE IMPERFECT IMPOSTOR

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CHAPTER I

JEREMY LAYTREE realized he had been a fool to come to the race meeting. Of all places in the world, a race-course is the least suitable for a presentable young man, perfectly dressed, but without even one single "bean" to make him welcome. Jeremy was on his beam ends, without a friend in the world: he had but recently come back from what was German East, to find the London he knew changing beyond recognition.

His last Bradbury had bought his first class railway ticket, and until things began to happen he was without hope.

He noticed the station master had touched his hat to him: that was queer. Several men had nodded, as distant acquaintances nod; he knew none of them. As he stood without even the necessary cash to buy a ticket for the Enclosure, a charming fellow had come up to him, talked about a good many things of which Jeremy was absolutely ignorant, and finally led him through the gates of the enclosure with a nod to the official on duty. They had had a drink together, and it was obvious that Jeremy was an old friend.

"There's a sort of Alice in Wonderland touch about this!" he thought. "Either it's a confidence trick on a big scale gone wrong, or my name's not Jeremy!"

A discreet and opulent bookmaker nodded to him. "Was he doing anything for the big race?"

"St. James, I think," said Jeremy idly.

"Give you twenties!" said the bookmaker.

"Righto!"

"The usual, I suppose, sir?"

"Yes." He strolled away. The experience was repeated three times, and Jeremy began to take fresh interest in life. It was all very mysterious. It was obvious that these people took him for somebody else. In the name of that somebody else, he had backed St. James and two other horses for "the usual." Who did they think he was, anyway? Some swell with pots of money, whose race-course credit was so good that a nod to a bookmaker was enough, evidently.

As in a dream, he saw the gayly-colored bobbing line of jockeys for the big race. They were off! Pink and green for St. James, and falling rapidly behind. Then the miracle happened. Pink and green became a swiftly-moving flash of light, drew level, forged ahead, one length, two lengths, three . . . a mighty roar went up . . . St. James! St. James!! St. James!!!

Jeremy was suddenly quite cold with excitement. St. James had won—"at twenties." He had won a lot of money. But the irony of the situation was unbearable. He did not know how much he had won, and he was quite unable to touch any of it. Settling

day would be Friday, he supposed, and the guy he was supposed to represent would reap the golden harvest! While he, Jeremy Laytree, had exactly three and sixpence, a first-class return to London, and no hopes or prospects.

All the horses he had backed had won. He had "had a good day," and he could never touch a penny of it. He did not know even who he was supposed to be.

The race-course suddenly became unbearable to him. The irony of his situation was too pungent, too cruel. He set his gray topper at a slightly more rakish angle, and with an ironical smile playing round his mouth, left the meeting.

As he entered the station he heard a groom say to a porter: " 'Im? Why that's Mr. Arthurton, son of Lord Amlett. He's a regular 'oner,' he is! Why, I could tell you . . ."

But Jeremy did not hear the rest of the story. He knew now who he was supposed to be, and he could not see that it helped him at all.

As the train rolled leisurely back to London, he saw things rather more clearly. At any rate, he might as well see the adventure through. He'd find out this Arthurton fellow and see what kind of a chap he was.

In any case there was nothing for him to do. He felt lost, lonely and detached. His contact with the people, of whose class he had once been, had made him restless. Life was before him, but he seemed to be stranded on the fringe of it; he did not know just how to attack it. He had neither money nor prospects, friends nor relations. He had been out in

Africa for fifteen years, had seen the war through in German East, had seen the change over in administration which followed, and had seen the whole of his savings wiped out by the crash of a local bank. He was left with a complete wardrobe, the price of his fare to England, and an irresistible desire to get back to civilization. His trip to the race meeting was just an idle freak, before he tackled the main problem of how he should begin to make his place in the world again.

"One thing at a time," he thought. "We'll find out all about Lord Amlett first!"

A London Directory, a telephone book, and a Peerage at the nearest reference library told him all he wanted to know. Lord Amlett was the third viscount; a widower with three children, none of whom was married: the heir was Philip Ashley Arthurton; then came Arthur Claude, the second son—"that's me!"—and then Olivia, the only daughter. The family seat was Pulldan Castle, and the family motto *Soyez Sage*,—"which means 'Be good,' I suppose," thought Jeremy. "Ah, well!"

He spent his last three and sixpence on a taxi which took him to a big block of mansions at the back of St. John's Wood.

There was a man sitting at a writing table in the window, and as he turned Jeremy started with surprise. It is always a shock to meet a double, and though Jeremy was in a sense prepared for it, he was astonished at the completeness of the likeness.

Arthur Arthurton was frankly dumbfounded. "You look like a long lost twin brother!" he said.

"Well, I'm not," answered Jeremy. "But quite

a number of people have taken me for you to-day."

"As for example?"

Jeremy told the story of his adventures. At the end, he asked: "If I may be curious, what is the 'usual'? Pardon my curiosity, but I'd like to know just how much money I have won for you."

"The usual is—or rather was—a hundred pounds. I gave up betting yesterday!"

"And with perfect success," said Jeremy. "You have won to-day something like three thousand pounds! Rather comic when you come to think of it!"

"Wouldn't have been comic if you'd lost!" said Arthurton.

"Man's ingratitude to man makes countless thousands mourn," quoted Jeremy, taking up his hat. "Good-by, and good luck to you. I apologize for taking your identity and for wasting your time. Anyway, it was amusing."

"Hi! Stop a minute! I say! Don't go like that. Sit down and have a gasper. Where are you going to dine? I should be only too happy to offer you a bit of dinner here. My man will see to it. Say yes. I'd like to have a talk with you. You're the sort of man I like. Dammit, I don't get three thousand quid dropped into my lap every day!"

"Don't you?" said Jeremy. "I thought perhaps you did."

"The least I can offer is fifty-fifty," said Arthurton. "I'm really deeply obliged. But I've got something else I want to talk about. Are you very busy?"

"I don't think busy is exactly the word. In fact,

if I wasn't of an active disposition I'd be hung all over with spider webs, I believe. Curious that no one seems to want anything doing over here."

"There's a lot of work wants doing, really," said Arthurton. "It's one of the humors of history. For five years the whole world was busy blowing wealth to blazes. A sort of non-stop Bonfire night. There's five years' work waiting to be done. And we've nearly two million unemployed. It's a joke, really!"

"Wait a moment. I've always believed I had a sense of humor. I never suspected that was a joke! Have you by chance tried it on any of the queues at the Labor Exchanges?"

"I don't suppose they'd see it. But really, I am astonished that you can't find a job."

"I can quite believe it," said Jeremy. "I'm astonished myself. But I think I have a clearer idea of its truth than you are likely to get. You see, you probably never knew that the first duty of man is to find a job. If you haven't got a job to do, you're a washout. You might as well be napood right off. You're different. You can go and put a monkey on a horse and look on it as a good day's work."

"Surely that was your doing."

"Yes. But I was merely your innocent confederate, your decoy duck, as it were. You've never had the dreadful feeling that unless you found something to do before sunset, a hard-hearted world would refuse to countenance your existence. Add to that the present situation that the modern world hasn't organized the jobs to go round, and you have the basic facts of your joke. It may have humor in it, but I think you've got to have a job and a place

and a settled position before you can taste the cream of it."

"Have you any friends?"

"None that I know of. My father and mother are both dead. They died in the early years of the war, while I was out in Africa. The little circle of friends we had has disappeared. In fact, there seems to be very little left of the civilization which existed before the war. London has changed. The very streets are different. I had a violent shock when I saw what was happening to Regent Street, for example. The shops I knew have gone. Business methods are different. There are some of the eternal realities left, of course. You can still get steak and kidney pudding for lunch, and I don't see that the race-course has changed much. But the women have all cut their hair, and St. Paul's is falling down, and you never see a solid golden quid any more. Man cannot live by steak and kidney pudding and race-courses alone, you know."

"You mean you have neither friends nor prospects."

"That is briefly what I intended to convey."

"Excellent."

"I'm glad you like it."

"Well, you see, I am in the throes of a brilliant idea. Dammit, you are like me, you know!"

The two men looked at one another again, each seeking out the tiny, almost imperceptible differences, the slight variation in shade of hair, the differences in expression, in attitude and mannerism.

"Yes. I am. Very like you. But I believe I'd know the difference anywhere!"

"You are an amusing ass. The point is that other people wouldn't. You've proved that this afternoon."

"Sheer fluke. Besides, I hardly knew I was doing it."

"That doesn't matter. Look here, if you're really on the rocks, a real lost nigger, will you do something for me?"

"What, something else? You're not thinking of trying to break the bank at Monte Carlo, are you? And remember this: I've got the rottenest luck that was ever dished out to an unfortunate mortal by the fairy queen at the christening. If I back a horse in my own name, it starts coughing at once, or has the staggers, or falls down in a faint. In fact most of the horses I backed out in Africa had to be insured as soon as the news got round. If I take a ticket in a raffle, the prize is either a set of lingerie, or I lose the ticket, or the treasurer absconds with the funds. My name's mud when it comes to luck."

"But surely when you borrowed my identity—"

"Hold on! I didn't borrow it. It was thrust on me. Some are born with an identity, and some have it thrust on them."

"Anyway, I offer you a job."

"Go on. Outline my gorgeous future. Jeremy Laytree, the famous impersonator. Families waited on daily."

"Have you any money at all?"

Jeremy produced fourpence in copper. "My face is my fortune, sir, he said—and fourpence in copper. That's all!"

"You'll do. It couldn't be better. Now wait a

moment. We mustn't rush it. Best make it water-tight first. Would you like to change for dinner?"

"I have the necessary boiled shirts and trimmings round at my room. I kept my party frock to the last."

"Leave 'em there. I'll lend you some kit. My clothes ought to fit you like a glove."

"I dare say. There are gloves and gloves, you know."

"Don't argue. Come in here. Be quick. I've had a brain wave."

Arthurton led the way into his bedroom. It was the perfect room of a selfish man of good taste. The bed was enormous; except for a dressing table in finely-figured walnut, three deep easy chairs, and two bookcases, there was little furniture.

The Hon. Arthur Arthurton's clothes were all contained in hanging wardrobes and on shelves hidden in the paneling of the room.

A bath room, white-tiled and glittering with shiny taps and fittings, opened off the bedroom.

Arthurton's clothes were laid out on the bed.

"Now, you get into those and give me yours," said Arthurton.

"What the—"

"Don't argue. I'm trying out a little brain wave."

"Another of your jokes?"

"I don't know yet."

When Jeremy was ready, Arthurton surveyed him.

"Your hair's wrong. Here, brush it this way."

"My hair'll give me away. It's always rumpled."

"So's mine, usually."

"Thank God you don't use hair oil! It would have been off."

"Now you're right."

"A perfect little gentleman," said Jeremy, looking at himself in the glass. "I like your taste in white waistcoats. Very chic. What do I do now?"

"Go and sit at the writing table in my room. Ring the bell, and when my man comes in, ask him to take a taxi down to Olio's—he knows where it is—and to bring back—let's see—caviar and some smoked salmon, some grapefruit, a couple of lobsters, a cold roast capon and a couple of bottles of Mersault. That ought to do, eh?"

"Add a salad and it's perfect. I'll try it on."

He sat at Arthurton's table, rang the bell, and in a soft, pleasant voice, as near to that of Arthurton's as he could manage, he ordered the meal.

The man servant bowed. "And the other gentleman, sir?"

"He's staying the night," said Jeremy, enjoying the fantastic situation.

"You're not going away to-night then, sir?"

"Ah!" thought Jeremy. "So I was going away, was I?"—"No!" he added aloud. "I've changed my mind for the present."

"Worked like a charm!" said Arthurton delightedly, when the man had gone. "You'll do. You'll do splendidly!"

"What do you mean, 'I'll do'? What'll I do?"

"You'll make a jolly good Arthur Arthurton, that's what you'll do."

"Ha! Ha! Very funny. It would be a joke. Ha! ha! . . . Er . . ."

Jeremy noticed that Arthurton was not laughing. He was thinking, and the sight of him made Jeremy go goosey all over.

"It would have been a good joke, I can see that," Jeremy went on. "A peach. But it's a would-have-been. All the best jokes are."

"Don't you make any mistake, my bright lad. This isn't a would-have-been. It's a clinger."

"No. You're on the wrong wave length! Nothing doing."

"Look here," said Arthurton. "Here's the bargain. You can draw the three thousand pounds. You can be the Hon. Arthur Arthurton, live in this flat, run up the usual bills, and do what you jolly well please. I want to get away. It would be jolly convenient for me to get away and to stay here at the same time, see? This is the solution."

"You haven't robbed a bank, I suppose?"

"No. I give you my word there's nothing shady. You won't find Scotland Yard round here in the morning."

"There are no inconvenient ladies in the case?"

"You'll have no trouble of that sort. My heart is fancy free."

"It's a good joke, Arthurton, but it's impossible."

"Nothing's impossible. You have already pulled it off unconsciously with the people on the racecourse and with my man. There is no earthly reason why you shouldn't go on living here for a little while like a modest violet while I discreetly lose

myself. When I come back, I hope that we'll see a good deal more of one another. I'll grow a mustache or a beard or something, so that people won't be confused."

"I'd like to see you in a beard. A nice pink one for preference. Go on, it's a bargain. I'll be the poor goop of this piece. Produce your family tree, and introduce me to your brothers and sisters, friends, relations, acquaintances, enemies, habits, preferences, occupations, tastes and prejudices!"

"That's a tall order!"

"So's your proposition."

"You need not worry. I live here in seclusion. I've had the place to myself for the last three weeks. My family doesn't call on me. I have few friends, save on the race-course, and you've seen your success with them. My father is Lord Amlett; I have a brother, Philip, who's a solicitor and the heir to the title, and a younger sister, Olivia."

Sketchily, and with a completely good-humored disregard of details, he sketched his life for the benefit of the man who was to take his place.

By a happy coincidence, they had both been at Cambridge, though at different colleges. Their accents were indistinguishable. They were both clean shaven.

"Tell me," said Jeremy. "Do you sing in your bath?"

"Sometimes. But very quietly. You'd hardly notice it."

"I don't. Perhaps it won't be noticed much."

"That's all right. They'll think I'm in love and have given up singing."

"And about teeth. Do you wear your own, or buy them at the Stores?"

"Mine are the original issue, thanks."

"You haven't any other vices—like getting up for breakfast, or keeping white mice, or dancing the Blues?"

"Not guilty. Any more enquiries?"

"I could go on asking questions for weeks. Really important questions, as to whether you like poached eggs on wet toast, or whether you wear spats, or swear at telephone girls, or go out without an overcoat in January just because it's not raining. All these things are of first-class importance. They are the stuff of life. They're what other people judge us by. Any one of them will spill the beans and you won't be here to pick them up."

"You take my word, it will be as easy as lying."

"For you, I dare say. I look as though I'm going to earn my three thousand with the sweat of my brow."

The dinner was excellent, and the two men sat by the open window long into the night with their cigars, adding details, stopping up gaps, and making perfect the colossal spoof which the Hon. Arthur Arthurton was to offer to an unsuspecting world.

The next morning Jeremy woke with a start. The strange room, the strange bed, the incredible memories of the previous day, all had the quality of a dream. Some one was knocking at the door.

"Come in!" he called.

"Your bath is ready, sir," said his man. "The

other gentleman has gone. He left this note for you."

The note was addressed to Arthur Arthurton, Esquire. It was brief.

"Dear Laytree,

I'm off before you change your mind. I've told you everything, and what you don't know you'll have to pump out of that man of mine. I had a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles to conceal my natural beauty when I left. I limped a bit too, and spoke with a squeaky, querulous voice, quite unlike my native sweetness. It worked like a charm.

Good luck, and hold the fort for me till I come back.

A. Arthurton."

"Yesterday," thought Jeremy, "I was plain Jeremy Laytree, without a bean or a care in the world. This morning I am the Honorable Arthur Arthurton, with strings of beans, and a comfortable flat, a fat-headed man servant, a lordly family, a brother and a sister, and Heaven only knows what complications before me."

"That's all right," he added aloud to the man who was setting out his things. "Yes, breakfast in bed—after my bath."

It was while he was opening his letters later, wrapped in a gorgeous blue and crimson silk dressing gown, that he heard a woman's voice. He could not distinguish the words, but he swore violently.

"And that blighter told me he never had any callers!" he said bitterly. "Well, she'll have to wait. I'll find out from Willett what her name is, and I'll just have to do the best I can."

But even that respite was denied him. Before he

could collect his scattered thoughts, the door was pushed open, and he heard a delightful, fresh, musical voice.

"You lazy rotter, Arthur. I say, give me a cup of coffee, that's a . . ."

There was a sudden silence. He faced the newcomer, a beautiful clear-eyed girl of twenty-four in a riding habit. This must be Olivia, his sister! This was the crucial test!

And then, as in a dream, he saw her shut the door carefully behind her, saw her advance to within a few feet of him, heard her cool impersonal musical voice:

"What are you doing in my brother's room?"

CHAPTER II

"I TOLD the silly ass it wouldn't work!" said Jeremy frankly. "Of all the wild and woolly ideas anybody ever conceived this was the peach! I suppose you're Olivia, Mr. Arthurton's sister?"

She moved to the bell without answering and rang. Willett answered, but before Olivia could speak, Jeremy said casually: "Some fresh coffee, please."

That tickled her, and she smiled again.

"Who are you exactly? You know you really are remarkably like Arthur. It was unfortunate for you that your first caller should be the sister of the man you're supposed to be. You can't deceive a sister, you know. But the more I look at you, the more convinced I am that you must be my brother. It's a miracle!"

"Plain Jeremy Laytree is my name, and I assure you that I ask nothing better than to depart in peace as I came. I hate playing the wolf in sheep's clothing."

"If you imagine my brother Arthur is a sheep, you've made a big mistake. He's not."

"No, I didn't think he was. And I don't feel particularly wolfish! Perhaps you'd better read this!" He handed her the letter, and then told her of the amazing series of circumstances which had landed him high and dry in this delightful flat.

"It beats me," said Olivia. "Men are babies. Give them the silliest game in the world to play, and they'll simply wallow in it."

"Don't blame me," smiled Jeremy. "It's his idea. I am just the humble dupe; the clay pigeon; the simple-minded confederate whom the 'Find the Lady' gentry take round with them. I couldn't help myself. He persuaded me to stay to dinner, lent me his festive garments, sat me down in a chair, and bade me pull the wool over the eyes of the unsuspecting Willett.

"The wool was pulled. Right down. I think that did it."

"You know you sound quite sensible really. I mean you're not lacking in ordinary gumption. How could you launch out on a thing like this? Supposing that I had screamed and fainted when I entered the room? Then sent for the police. What would you have done?"

"Don't put any more breeze up me than is absolutely essential," said Jeremy. "I am quite clear in my mind that if I get out of this with my five senses and my personal liberty, I shall be lucky. It's not that I'm afraid of being sent to Wormwood Scrubs. But I was reading an article the other day about Brighter Prisons. I feel I could bear anything but that. In any case, if you care to summon the police, there is a telephone somewhere about. Take off the receiver and shout 'Fire.' Something like that. It's quite easy. Have some of this hot coffee first. It's really rather good."

"Thank you. I'm not going to summon the police —yet. I believe you can do it. If you could take in

the bookmakers, you could take in any one. Where has Arthur gone?"

"Holy Smoke!" said Jeremy. "I never asked him for his address. Perhaps he'll send it."

"Perhaps he won't," said Olivia. "I know him. And how are you going to manage for money when you've spent what you get from the bookmakers? You don't suppose they'll pay you £3,000 in cash, do you? Are you going to forge my brother's signature?"

"I hadn't thought of that," said Jeremy. "Now you mention it, the answer is in the negative!"

"Are you going to pay his bills?"

"Oh, no. Oh, dear, no! I have thought of that."

"Did he tell you who were his solicitors? And what are you going to do about Lady Dorothy?"

"What Lady Dorothy is that?"

"Oh, you men! Of all the helpless, improvident, ingenuous, ignorant, childish babies—I give you up!"

"No. Don't do that. I say. About this Lady Dorothy?"

"Well, you're supposed to be going to marry Lady Dorothy! That's all!"

"My hat!" He looked so utterly crestfallen at this, that the warm liking she already felt for him increased. He was a nice boy.

As for Jeremy, he was utterly and completely bowled over, partly by the sudden realization of the awful difficulties of his position, and partly by his whole-hearted admiration and worship of this wonderful girl, with her fresh young beauty, her courage, her frankness and her easy good humor.

He drank a cup of scalding hot coffee, and mumbled something about it being better that he should depart as he had come, and let the Honorable Arthur Arthurton fend for himself.

"It's in your hands now anyway," he added.

She smiled.

"Well, do you know, I'm inclined to say 'stay.'

"If Arthur wanted to get away, I suppose he had good reason for it. The more I look at you, the more I'm certain you can carry it through. Anyway, there's no harm done, and you can keep quietly to yourself here until he comes back. If I give you my blessing, no one will ever suspect. We can square the money difficulty by having all checks made payable to my account. I'll be your treasurer."

"But, Lady Dorothy?" he groaned.

"I confess I can't help you there. You'll have to help yourself. And now I'll go into the other room while you dress, and you shall take me out shopping and to lunch at the Savoy, and then I want to see Sybil Thorndike in the evening—and don't be long!"

She was gone before he could collect his scattered wits. For two pins he would have bolted. But, curiously enough, something of her young enthusiasm seemed to have fired his imagination, and the whole affair struck him anew as a gigantic spoof, a glorious lark. With her help and knowledge, he might be able to pass himself off. Without it, he would have been lost. What a girl! A thorough sport if ever he had met one. Was she beautiful? He could not make up his mind. Her nose was divinely straight, her head small and well shaped.

Her chestnut hair was bobbed; her mouth was a little too large for classic beauty, and her cheeks were dimpled. But best of all were her eyes. He did not know their color, but he knew their expression; laughter, wit, intelligence, sympathy, courage, sincerity,—all the virtues of the civilized tradition seemed to him to be centered in those eyes, all the knowledge and culture of centuries, all the beauty and charm of old established things. Whatever happened, he could never forget those eyes, with their dancing happiness and frank, far-seeing courage.

And Jeremy had great and urgent need of contact with tradition and old established things. Behind his cheery humor there was a wistful longing to find something to which he could attach himself. He was intensely English, but he seemed to have no place in England. The war and his absence had dissolved all that circle of friends and acquaintances he had known in his younger days. He had tried to find some of the men who had been up at Cambridge with him. Many of his own particular set were dead. Others had remained in India or Egypt or Africa, forming new circles of friends, building up new lives. Jeremy had cut himself off from his life in Africa. He wanted to settle down again in England where he belonged. The fact that England seemed chary of welcoming him, puzzled him.

As he dressed, leisurely, and at great length, in Arthurton's clothes, he thought of his position in regard to this greatest need of his. This game would give him no standing.

"I'm of so little importance to the world at large

that I can wear another man's identity and no one will suspect. I've about as much identity of my own as a flatfish. But then Olivia knew me. Jolly girl. I wonder . . . Curious to be calling her Olivia, by the way. I suppose I'll have to. Can't call my sister Miss Arthurton. She'll have to call me Arthur! Wow! This is a real shimozzle. Arthur!" He grinned at himself in the glass. "Good morning, Arthur! Now, would Arthur like a wing collar, or a turn down with points? Arthur's got both. Arthur's got boxes of collars, and a mile or two of ties. Arthur! . . . It's a rotten name. I don't know what my parents were thinking of."

Willett came in at that moment with his master's coat ready brushed.

"Willett?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Don't you think Arthur is a poisonous name?"

"No, sir."

"I do. I don't like it. It doesn't suit me somehow. I suppose I could change it?"

"You could do so by deed poll if you wished, sir. I had an uncle who changed his name to Eustace, sir. It made quite a sensation in the family."

"It would. I don't think it will be Eustace. No, perhaps I'll stick to Arthur."

"His lordship would prefer it, I think, sir," said Willett with the ghost of a smile.

"His lordship? . . . oh . . . yes . . . my father . . . of course. I suppose he chose it. People do funny things, you know, Willett."

"Yes, sir. Will that be all just now, sir? Thank you, sir."

"Friendly old fish, Willett," thought Jeremy, "but blind, blind as a sandworm: bat-eyed to the ninth degree. Now, Arthur, we're ready, old boy. Come and tell the world."

While he was waiting for Olivia in the lounge of the Savoy before lunch, a charming middle-aged woman stopped him.

"How do you do!" she purred, evidently pleased to see him. "I didn't expect to see you here!"

"For that matter, I didn't expect to see you either," said Jeremy frantically wondering who on earth she could be. "I'm just having a bit of lunch with Olivia. She'll be here in a minute."

"Sorry I can't stay," said the unknown woman. "But now I've got you, I must ask you to dine with us to-night. Eight sharp you know, and we're dancing afterwards. Bring Olivia along. Now no excuses. Au revoir."

And before he could protest, she passed through the revolving doors into her waiting car.

"We're invited out to dinner and a dance," he said helplessly when Olivia turned up.

"Where to?"

"Heaven only knows. She was a charming woman, middle-aged, dark brown hair, a black silky-looking cloak, and a chauffeur in maroon and silver."

"Had she a vanity bag of Chinese embroidery?"

"I don't know!"

"A black hat with a diamond dagger pin?"

"I don't know! But she had two gold-filled teeth, and her nose was shiny!"

"It must be Mrs. Mainterly. It couldn't be any one else. Thank goodness you noticed the nose!"

"We can't very well blow round to Mrs. Mainterly's house for dinner and a dance on the strength of a shiny nose! That's a bit thin, you know."

"I'll ring her up later on. Say you made a hash of the message, and we're not sure whether it was to-night or to-morrow."

He heard her telephoning later.

"We'll be delighted to come," he heard her say. "We were going to the theater, but I'd much rather dance. So stupid of Arthur to mix up the dates. Oh, yes. But you know what men are."

"Hear that, you great baby?" said Jeremy, kicking himself. "Look here, Arthur, you've got to pull yourself together. You're a blister."

"Be quiet!" whispered Olivia. "Oh, yes. Anybody we know coming? . . . That will be charming. Good-by. Till to-night."

"There we are then. Once more your feminine 'verve' has saved the situation. I only hope you'll throw me a life belt or two to-night. This is going to be my 'star' performance. I shouldn't like it to be for one night only. I should feel easier if I had a book of the words though."

"I'll pull you through," said Olivia, and she was as good as her word.

Jeremy took Mrs. Mainterly in to dinner. He talked drivel while Olivia was out of reach, fearing to tread on common ground. When he found himself seated between Olivia and Mrs. Mainterly, he felt more composed.

He was beginning to like the game. He had been introduced to four other guests and Olivia had wheedled out of Mrs. Mainterly the names of those

who were coming in after dinner to the dance. Two of them he was supposed to know slightly, but the others were all strangers to them both.

"It's like old times to see you again," said his hostess. "Let me see now, when did we see you last?"

"It's a long time, isn't it?" said Jeremy pleasantly. "Time does fly."

"Yes, but where was it?"

Jeremy repressed an inclination to say "Search me," and instead nudged Olivia.

"When did we meet Mrs. Mainterly last, Olivia? Wasn't it at the . . ."

"At the Faut-William's ball? Yes, you're right, Arthur."

"I thought it was. I couldn't remember anything since then." He breathed again.

Olivia was pretty quick in the uptake.

It was during the fish course that Mr. Mainterly began to rock the boat. This was more difficult, since Olivia could not be expected to know the sort of thing he would talk of with her brother.

"By the way, Arthurton," he said. "I met that friend of yours in the city yesterday. You know the man with the salmon fishing . . . What's his name?"

"You don't mean old Jennifer?" said Jeremy, and immediately added to himself, "Now why the blazes did I say Jennifer? I'm committed to Jennifer now. Suppose there is a Jennifer?"

"No, no, not Jennifer. I don't know Jennifer. This chap's name is . . . oh! you know . . ."

"Perhaps you mean . . . no, it wouldn't be him. He's got no salmon fishing. I give it up. Can't think whom you mean."

"But dash it all, you introduced the chap to me. Thought he was a friend of yours."

"He may be. But I can't place him for a moment. Sure you don't mean Jennifer? Little chap with a face like a boiled egg. Rimless pince-nez and a nasty habit of rubbing his hands? A good chap. What Jennifer doesn't know about salmon fishing isn't worth putting in a book of reminiscences. He lives out Surrey way somewhere. Got a charming old sixteenth century farm. He married . . . let's see . . . oh, I know . . . Rodford's daughter—Ella her name was. They've three bonny kiddies. Jolly lucky chap, Jennifer."

Olivia, released from conversation with her immediate neighbor, became conscious of the wild recklessness in which Jeremy was inventing an entirely spurious family. He had created the happy Jennifer out of nothing on the spur of the moment, built him up out of words, with his house and his wife and his family—a formless ghost, an illusion. She trod violently on Jeremy's foot.

"That's not the Jennifer down Bletchingley way, Mr. Arthurton?" said one of the guests. "I used to know them. Knew one of the boys."

"Ah! no. Quite the other direction. Besides these kiddies are still in the Teddy Bear and Marie biscuit stage."

Again Olivia stamped on his toe.

"But, I say, Arthurton. You must remember that

chap's name. I've invited him to dinner, and I can't remember his name for the life of me. It'll be jolly awkward."

"Tell the butler to announce him when he comes, in a big, butlerish voice. That's easy. If I think of his name I'll let you know. And one of these days I'll introduce you to Jennifer. Did I ever tell you of how he saved my life?"

"No. Oh! do tell us."

"I think Mr. Jennifer would prefer that story to be kept dark, Arthur," said Olivia, who was appalled at the risks he was running.

"No, that's all right. Old Jennifer won't mind. It was an accident anyway.

"You see, we were out after a lion, and Jennifer came on the mother and two cubs quite suddenly. Touching sight. Jennifer wanted a skin. He collects, you know. House like a museum. Well, the mother lion went for him like a house on fire. Fortunately I got her with both barrels, and Jennifer was like a dog with three tails, because he'd got three skins. Anyway, while we were marking the spot for the servants, he happened to hear a noise in the undergrowth, and there was father lion looking distinctly peeved—at me. Jennifer hadn't got his gun, but he risked it and reached for it. That movement, you understand, was bound to attract the lion's attention to him and away from me. I was keeping very still. The rest of the story is rather mixed up, but when I sorted Jennifer and the lion out, the lion was dead, and Jennifer had some pretty useful rips on his arm and shoulder. He just reached his gun

in time. But it was by sheer accident he hit the brute in the right spot. Or at all. There's a lot of room round a lion, you know."

"But how thrilling!" said one of the women. "That was during the war?"

"Yes . . ."

"In Palestine, wasn't it?" said Olivia significantly, treading on his toe again.

"Yes," he admitted hurriedly, thrusting the words "German East" back into his inner consciousness.

"But are there any lions in Palestine?"

"Oh, hundreds. It's over-run with them. On the outskirts, you know," he answered, and to himself he thought, "There's one thing I can promise you, Mr. Arthur Arthurton. You'll have a jolly fine reputation as a first-class liar if this goes on for long."

"It certainly was a star performance," said Olivia, as they sat in the car on the way to her hotel. "But I can't keep up with you. You've got Baron Munchausen beaten to nothing. Is there such a person as Jennifer?"

"Unfortunately, no. I'm sorry about Jennifer. I was just beginning to like him. Jolly to think of him living down in Sussex . . ."

"You said Surrey before!"

"Did I? A mere slip . . . down in Surrey with his jolly wife and those three jolly kiddies. I shan't be happy until I've met Mr. Jennifer. After all, he saved my life, you know!"

"You are absolutely hopeless. I wash my hands

of you. You can't be serious for five minutes. I don't think I can take on the responsibility any longer!"

But there was more than a hint of a smile in her eyes as she bade him good night. He would see her again.

This was about the finest practical joke he had ever taken part in. The future was crammed with possibilities.

"I'm launched!" he thought, as he was undressing in his flat in the early hours of the following morning.

"I'm launched! I'm the Honorable Arthur Arthurton, for all the world to see!"

Just then the telephone bell rang violently.

"Hello! Yes, Arthur speaking! That you, Olivia? What's the matter? What! No! You don't mean it."

"I do," came the answer. "Father was found dead in his study at midnight. I've just had a telephone message. They want me to go up there at once, and you are to come with me. What are you going to do?"

CHAPTER III

JEREMY began slowly to dress himself again. He looked at the inviting four-poster bed, with its snowy pillows, the silk pyjamas neatly laid out, the book ready to hand on the bed table with its silk shaded light.

He was tired, he had been looking forward to a long, luxurious sleep—and then came this call from Olivia!

So Lord Amlett was dead. "What am I to Amlett, or Amlett to me?" he thought, stifling a desperate yawn. "When I consented to take on the Honorable Arthur's troubles, I didn't anticipate this. Funny losing a father. What does one do I wonder? I might ask Willett, of course. But he'd think it queer. Jolly inconvenient of the old boy to die just now. Thoughtless sort of thing to do." He stopped himself just in time from putting on a blue tie and a blue lounge suit.

"Mourning's the only wear, I suppose. I must pull myself together. After all, he's Olivia's father, and she's bound to be cut up about it. Pity I'm not the lugubrious sort. It's so long since I had a father anyway."

There was a delicate point of happy irony in this, if he could but see it.

Here, in Arthurton's position, he was receiving from life just the gifts he had most lacked. He had position, money, a circle of friends, a brother and a

sister, and until this happened he had had a father. "And now I've got to mourn a man who is less than nothing to me! Jolly unfair I call it. I wonder what he'd have said to me if he'd met me in the flesh. It's a wise father that knows his own son, of course. But he'd have rumbled me. He can't rumble me now. Dash it. I'd better chuck the whole business. I can't do it."

He chose a topper from the hat cupboard in the paneled wall, corrected its original rather rakish tilt to a more sober angle. He rang the bell.

This was a mad business. If it had not been for Olivia . . . He had promised to try for the 4.20 train. He couldn't disappoint her. . . . He tilted the topper again on one side and surveyed the result with some satisfaction. Then . . . oh, damn! . . . he put it back once more on a dead level . . . a charming girl. So frank, so open! Sincerity too. You know, not often sincerity goes with real charm . . . that charm which is almost like magic. He smiled at his image in the glass, but immediately discovered that the topper had worked its way naturally to one side. There was only one way for him to wear that topper, and that was with a tilt like a jolly boy. He removed the hat absent-mindedly, and still thinking of Olivia, kicked it under the bed. . . . Perhaps the real Arthurton would read of the death of his father in the papers; he'd probably be up at Pulldan Castle soon after they were. It was all quite simple . . . a jolly girl too . . . and very loyal. Look how she stuck up for him over that Jennifer business. He had been a fool to invent all that. He'd have come a mucker over those

Palestine lions too. But with Olivia . . . a real she woman . . . ah! here was Willett.

Jeremy began to whistle "It ain't goin' to rain no more."

"Did you ring, sir?"

Jeremy broke off whistling. Somehow he didn't think he ought to have begun.

"Yes . . . er . . . you'll find a hat under the bed, Willett. Give it to the postman, will you? It hasn't that air of gravity a topper ought to have. It has a positive Newmarket look about it."

"Yes, sir," said Willett, solemnly. Willett had just risen from his bed, and was still a little bleary-eyed. He waited for orders with the patient indifference of his kind.

"And . . . er . . . put some duds in a bag or two, will you? I'm going up to Pulldan."

"Nothing wrong, I hope, sir?"

"Oh, no. Nothing wrong! No. Quite. That is . . . yes, there is something very wrong. It's very serious, Willett—(He'll think I'm dippy going on like this.)—I've just heard from . . . er . . . my sister . . . that Lord Amlett passed away in the night. It's a serious business, I can tell you."

The shocked expression on Willett's face warned Jeremy of the serious nature of his imposture. It was one thing to pretend to be the Honorable Arthur when everything was all serene. But in a moment of emotional crisis, it was another matter. These people would feel deeply grieved and hurt if they found him out. He was on the point of confessing the whole affair to Willett, when a bell was heard to ring. Willett excused himself, and shortly

afterwards Jeremy joined Olivia, who was all ready for the journey.

"Look here," he said when they found themselves seated in a first-class carriage alone. "I'm not at all sure about all this. Hadn't we better wait until we see whether your brother turns up? I'm beginning to feel a bit like a defaulting solicitor. I mean, dash it all, it's serious, you know."

"You can't back out now," said Olivia. "It's your own fault anyway. If Arthur turns up, we can explain. If he doesn't, well, you've just got to go on being Arthur, that's all."

Jeremy did not want to bother her. She was sufficiently distressed about the sudden news of her father's death, without having his difficulties thrust upon her.

"I know Arthur," she went on quietly. "He's been wild from his childhood. I don't know what harumscarum ideas he's got in his head now, but if he said three months, you can be sure it won't be less. What did he say he was going to do?"

"I've rather a suspicion he wanted to keep that dark," said Jeremy. "That's what I'm for. Sorry."

"Some wild business, I suppose. I'm glad you're loyal to him. He'll need it before this is finished."

"So shall I," thought Jeremy wistfully. He glanced at her profile clean cut against the rose pearl light of the early morning. She was beautiful. There was a hint of pathos in her beauty now, enhanced by the slight pallor of fatigue, which made her seem fragile, delicate, almost unearthly. Her eyes were fixed on the slowly moving distances, their expression impenetrable, wistful. He wanted to

take her in his arms and tell her not to worry, not to think about the future. He pulled himself up sharply.

"Break step, you lunatic," he said to himself. "You've got one large consignment of trouble with your name on it already. Don't be a thundering lunatic and upset the only help you've got."

"I suppose they'll all be there?" he said at length.

"Philip will be there. There will be no one else until old Jenkins comes. He's the solicitor, you know."

"And Philip is my brother. Shall I like Philip?"

"No. He and Arthur used to quarrel violently every time they met. In fact Philip persuaded my father to forbid Arthur the house. That's why he lived in London. They hated one another like poison."

"Splendid!" said Jeremy. "I can see I'm going to have a happy time. There's Lady Dorothy whom I haven't met, but whom I'm going to marry, and my eldest brother who hates me like poison, and all the time I'm somebody else! You have no more good news for me, I suppose?"

His expression was so whimsically hopeless, that she laughed in spite of herself.

"Don't you worry," she said. "I'll see you through. Philip is rather short-sighted anyway, and he will accept you if he's seen that I do. It will never enter his head."

"By the way," said Jeremy. "Would you mind telling me how you knew that I wasn't your brother?"

There was silence for some time. Her eyes were

fixed away ahead, and the ghost of a smile played round her lips.

"You were very quick," urged Jeremy.

"Yes," she answered simply, and then, as though with difficulty, added: "You see . . . you are . . . different."

"Um," said Jeremy. "That explains it perfectly! It is now quite clear."

"Well, I can't explain it. You see Arthur is Arthur."

"Yes, I see that," he said gravely. "That is important."

"And you are . . . well, just you."

"Thank you. I knew there must be an explanation somewhere. Do you know you're quite good at explaining? There should be a career in it. You could be a professional explainer, and tell people what they mean. Some of them need it badly."

"I think you are horrid. You know what I mean."

"Exactly. That's why you are such a good explainer. Now, if I said, 'You see Lady Dorothy is Lady Dorothy, and you are just you,' it wouldn't sound convincing at all. It's quite true, of course. But it doesn't seem to carry the same weight. That's what I mean. That's why you'd make a good explainer."

"I think you're perfectly beastly!"

"No, but seriously, Olivia. It did sound convincing. You know you almost convinced yourself, didn't you?"

"I think you're absolutely impossible!"

"But don't you see that you haven't answered the question at all? I deceived the bookmakers, the

race-course people, Willett, the Mainterlys and so on. But the minute you clapped eyes upon me you said, 'Who is this vile fellow'—or words to that effect. Now, how did you know?

"It's not mere idle curiosity that makes me ask. I really ought to know, because some one else may spot the same thing. Do my ears stick out too far? Is it the natural honesty in my face that surprises you? Is it my quiet, unassuming modesty or my inability to hold my own in conversation?"

"Help!" said Olivia. "You are really rather a . . . well, never mind. It's none of those things. I can't tell you what it was. You just couldn't be my brother. You couldn't be anybody else. . . . Now, look here . . . stop trying to make me talk or I will say something I have no intention of saying, and something I don't mean."

Jeremy pondered this mystery for some time, adding to it the further puzzle of the sudden flush of faint color that touched her cheeks. His first conclusions were so complimentary that he had to pull himself together and start again. "You are . . . well, just you!" Very nice to hear that! But how much did it mean. "Something I don't mean." Suppose she were forced to mean something she didn't mean?

"I'm going mad, that's what it is," he thought. "I knew there was a simple explanation somewhere."

He got no more clews to the mystery that morning. They had a simple breakfast of rolls and coffee on the train, and feeling a little rested set off for the Castle.

The station-master gave Jeremy a shock. He was

just leaving the station for the waiting car, when he felt a hand upon his arm. "This is what it feels like!" he thought instantly. "Shall I say that I'll go quietly?"

Fortunately he said nothing. The old station-master simply said: "I'm sorry to hear the bad news, sir. I've known his Lordship all my life pretty well. But I'm glad you've come. It's a pity he couldn't have seen you before he died."

"So that's that," reflected Jeremy, as he got into the car. "The old Johnnie seems to be a friend of the family, and he didn't spot me."

But as the car gathered speed, Jeremy looked back and saw the station-master gazing up the road after them. Now, was there a bee in his bonnet, or was he just upset? Again he was reminded of the almost incredible difficulties of his position, but again he looked at Olivia to whose cheeks the fresh summer morning air had brought a fine vigorous beauty. He was going through with it.

"They can only hang me," he thought cheerfully, "and I have no other engagements."

Pulldan Castle gave him another shock. In fact until he saw the massive serenity of that ancient Tudor pile with its curiously twisted chimneys and high gables, its ancient park with lawns of flawless beauty, its woods and spinneys, its stream, its modern boat house, its old Tudor lodges and high wrought-iron gates, its century-old cedars and oaks, its air of being just right, serenely impeccable in its knowledge of its own perfection, its evidences of hordes of servants, and its traditional poise, he had not had a clear idea of just what he was doing.

Here in the drive, rapidly approaching the Castle, face to face with its concrete personality, he felt his courage ebb from him. Everything around him was real, was old and tried in use, had existed in its place in the order of things from time immemorial.

"Even the swans probably have a pedigree," he thought, "and the door mat must be hall marked. And I—I am the rift within the lute. I am the one fake in a gallery of genuine antiques, surrounded by a company of experts. I am the sheep in wolf's clothing. I expect they nail dud half-crowns to the counters of the shops round here. I wonder what they'll do with me? I'm nothing but a cuckoo!"

Olivia must have fathomed his distress. She laid her gloved hand upon his arm for a moment.

"Cheer up," she said with a smile. "It may not be so bad. I'll see you through. I'm very fond of Arthur!"

Now what did that mean? She was very fond of Arthur, but he, Jeremy, was "different." Did it mean anything?

Anyway, Arthur was Arthur, and he, Jeremy, was Jeremy. He had that basic fact to cling to.

He needed it in his first conscious struggle with Pulldan Castle and all it represented. The irony of his position was bad enough to bear in the easy comfort of St. John's Wood. Here it was emphasized and underlined beyond endurance.

Here was everything Jeremy had sought, beauty, culture, tradition, honor of place and name, respect and position, responsibility and purpose; it was all here, and whoever came to Pulldan must feel part of the actual growth of the place. All this was pre-

sented to Jeremy, thrust upon him, like an issue of rations and with as little ceremony, he thought. And yet, he knew that none of it had any meaning for him; his place in the tradition was a borrowed place. He was like a district messenger in a theater queue, keeping open a seat in the front row of the pit for a play which he himself could never see. He sought just that place in the very center of English life which he had found, and yet, the place could never be his, nor could he occupy it save as a bird of passage. They passed an old gardener working in one of the beds. "Probably descended straight from William the Conqueror," thought Jeremy, "and all the rose bushes can be traced back bud by bud to the Wars of the Roses. That's what it feels like."

"What was the word they found on Queen Mary's heart at the post mortem?" he asked Olivia suddenly.

"Calais! Why?"

"I was only thinking that if they had a post mortem on me, they'd find the words: 'Made in Birmingham,' or something of that sort written on my heart."

"You must have a large heart. . . . But don't you worry. You'll be all right."

There was no time for more. The wheels of the car scrunched upon the gravel, the doors swung open, and a moment later he was standing in the ancestral hall which was supposed to be his.

"Come on," said Olivia. "Philip will be in the gun-room. He uses it as a study because it's sunny. Come on!"

Unwillingly Jeremy followed her. What was he

to say to this supposed brother of his? They hated one another like poison. Jeremy had never hated any one like that. He would leave it to the other fellow. Hang it, here he was at the door of the gun-room. A tall, thin, supercilious-looking blighter, dried and withered, with a semi-bald head, pince-nez and—what Jeremy most detested—side whiskers! Yes, perhaps he could hate this brother of his quite easily. Already he felt equal to a sample quarrel.

"Hullo, Olivia," said Philip stiffly, holding out his cheek to be pecked at. Then he looked at Jeremy. "So you've come!" he added. "Had any breakfast?"

"Yes, thanks. Had some coffee on the train."

"Well, there's a lot to do. I want to talk to you. I shan't want you, Olivia."

"All right," said Olivia, "I'll go and wash my face. I feel like nothing on earth. Your things will be in the blue room, Arthur."

The door had closed behind her before Jeremy realized she was speaking to him. He *was* Arthur. It was important to remember that. But where was the blue room?

"Righto!" he said to the closed door, and then turned to meet Philip in the full light of the room. This was the crucial test. This was his brother. How in the name of all that was genial Philip managed to be Arthur's brother, Jeremy couldn't make out. They were as unlike as possible. But there was no time for reflection. Somehow he had to put it across with this dried-up human being, had to persuade him that he, Jeremy, was the brother with whom Philip had bathed, played cricket, robbed or-

chards and fought as a child. Alone in the quiet room with its racks of guns, and its great writing desk in the south-east window, he felt very helpless, very ignorant, and possessed of a mad desire to laugh.

"You ought to have been here sooner," said Philip, in a thin voice which reminded Jeremy of the sound of dry leaves in an east wind.

"I am not a thought reader, and I don't keep a tame medium," said Jeremy. "I came as soon as I got your message from Olivia. She rang me up at my rooms. I was just going to bed. We caught the 4.20 A. M., my dear brother. Remember that A. M. Dash it all A. M. is A. M."

"And you were of course too late." The thin sound drifted forlornly about the room, mournful, reproachful, making Jeremy think of sackcloth, dust and ashes. A thoroughly uncomfortable, unfriendly cuss, this brother of his, a dangerous, cold sort of man, untouched by humor, the man of all men with whom he could make no progress whatever.

"Thanks to you, yes. I was too late. If you had wired when the old man was taken ill, I might have been in time. Why didn't you wire or write or send me a nice, brotherly note saying all would be forgiven?"

This was a bold stroke, for Jeremy did not know whether the real Arthurton knew that his father had been ill. But it came off.

"You ought to have known the old man worried about your going away. If you had behaved yourself, there would have been no necessity for such a step. That wasn't without its effects on him."

"That is a nice brotherly suggestion," said Jeremy, defending the absent Arthur. "I suppose that you feel quite guiltless in the matter. You would. You missed your share of the milk of human kindness, old chap. You're not human. It's a pity you can't get a prescription for it. But it's too late now. If you could have a little daily dose . . . but you can't. You can't help it. We've just got to put up with you. In any case, just let me say this. I've no intention whatever of putting up with you. When the east wind blows, I shut the window. When all this business is over, I'm going back to London. I'm going to shut my window. You'll be better off without me. You and I get on together like cats and prussic acid. There's no use hiding the facts. You've got about as much red blood in your veins as a clothes peg!"

Jeremy was angry. Philip's thin-blooded attitude, his air as of a moral accountant, his superiority, his thin, rustling voice, all angered him. He couldn't stand there in the character of the absent Arthurton and let this snifty moral highbrow make thin, sour aspersions against Arthurton's loyalty. It wasn't good enough.

"I am quite aware of my own shortcomings," said Philip without emotion. "I don't need you or your picturesque, if rather tactless, slang to tell me what I am. What you do not seem to have realized is just this. Some one has to be here to look after the estate."

"Well? It would suit you down to the ground. You could bully the gamekeepers to your heart's content."

"That may be. I am not going to allow you to make me angry. But please understand this. I intend to go to London very soon. I've got to think of my position. I shall be in London for some time. There are many things that must be done. I've got to take my place in the Lords for example—"

"Your what?"

"My place in the Lords."

"My hat!" exclaimed Jeremy. "I never thought of that!"

"Of what?" said Philip coldly, tapping his desk with a bone paper knife.

"Why, you're Lord Amlett! My gracious aunt! Lord Amlett!"

"Have you gone mad?" said the new Lord Amlett.

"No, not yet," answered Jeremy weakly, "but there's plenty of time!"

Then he noticed to his horror that the man was looking at him fixedly.

Perhaps it was a habit of his to stare like that. When he was thinking for example. Yes, but what was he thinking about? Jeremy felt uncomfortably hot and then uncomfortably cold. Why the dickens had he been such an idiot as to take this impossible job on? Where was Olivia, and why had she left him like this? Still Philip, Lord Amlett, stared; he removed his pince-nez and rubbed them with a silk handkerchief, replaced them and stared again, his expression changing from its average of stony indifference to one of incredulous hostility and anger.

Jeremy, divided between nervous apprehension

and suppressed hysterics, moved across the room towards the great open fireplace, to get a little further out of range of those hostile, shortsighted eyes. He noticed that Philip moved so as to place himself between him and the door. Perhaps his sudden sense of a new hostility was all imagination.

There was nothing in it. Perhaps some of his words had really stung Philip to real anger.

"I wish Olivia would come back," he thought sadly. "Here am I on a stormy night and the pilot is upstairs washing his face or powdering his nose or something."

"Well?" he said aloud. "If there's nothing else you want to say to me, no further evidence of your brotherly love and affection you want to give me, I'll . . . er . . . mike off. I'm sure you won't mind."

Still that thin, threatening silence. Jeremy could see the pale parchmenty face, with its pince-nez, looming before him like a physical threat.

"I'll go and find Olivia," he said.

"Stay where you are," said the new Lord Amlett.

"All right. Only do hurry up and say your little piece." He drew a cigarette case from his pocket, tapped a cigarette, lit it and blew a cloud of smoke. Lord Amlett moved nearer. He was very close now. Jeremy watched him, fascinated, helpless; he could think of nothing but rabbits—nice, little, round, furry chaps, with cheerful, bobbing seats, and pathetically humorous ears, being fed to snakes. Amlett was the snake, and appeared to be about to strike.

"If you think I'm going to stay here while you do the lizard act, you've read the omens wrong, brother Philip. I'm off."

"Stop!" said Lord Amlett suddenly.

"Ah! I was afraid so. He's gone batty now."

Amlett did not answer. Instead he reached out a cold, thin hand, and took the cigarette case from Jeremy's unresisting fingers.

"Yes, do have a cigarette!" said Jeremy lightly.

"You ought to have known," answered Lord Amlett, pausing deliberately on each word as though he were passing sentence, "that I do not smoke!"

"That," said Jeremy to himself, "has torn it!"

"J. L." said Lord Amlett, peering at the initials on the cigarette case. He dropped it with a clatter on the table. It flew open, and the cigarettes rolled out onto the carpet.

"What do you mean—I ought to have known!" said Jeremy. "Of course I knew. I was just pulling your leg. You're so beastly touchy."

"You would be well advised to drop the whole game," said Lord Amlett severely. He touched a bell as he spoke. "I do not know what your game is. You seem to have imposed yourself upon my sister. Because she's a woman, I suppose. They're all alike. Can't see further than the end of their noses. Taken in by any trickster that comes along. No. Don't move. I warn you. This means jail. Impersonation's a pretty serious business, I can tell you. It's just like Olivia. Trust a woman to make a fool of herself."

"Well, you're wrong there," said Jeremy. "She spotted that I was a fraud in less than twenty sec-

onds. You've taken twenty minutes. So she's one up on you!"

For a moment Jeremy thought Lord Amlett was going to forget himself and punch his nose. But he controlled himself and said incredulously: "She spotted you were a fraud in twenty seconds! But I heard her call you Arthur only half an hour ago!"

"Yes, you did," said Jeremy. "And I'll bet you half-a-crown you'll be calling me Arthur yourself before the day's out!"

"I don't bet," said Lord Amlett frigidly. "But I'll pay fifty pounds to any charity you like to name if I do!"

"Right," said Jeremy. "Ah, here she is. I say, Olivia, he's found me out!"

"What, already?"

"It took him more than twenty minutes. It takes a woman to see through a fraud, you know."

"Olivia!" said Lord Amlett angrily. "What does this farce mean? Who is this man? And why do you call him Arthur?"

"Now, my dear Philip, do keep your temper. And don't be superior. There's nothing to be superior about. Just listen. This is Mr. Jeremy Laytree. He has very kindly consented to take Arthur's place. As you have noticed he is so like Arthur that no one, save perhaps you and I, could suspect that he isn't Arthur. Where Arthur is, nobody knows, not even Mr. Laytree. When they changed places, nobody suspected that father was so ill; it was to be for three months, and Mr. Laytree was to remain in London. It's unfortunate, but in view of what has happened, he'll just have to carry on."

Jeremy watched with the first real feeling of enjoyment he had had since the game began. For a while it looked as though Lord Amlett was preparing to burst. He certainly seemed to grow bigger, as though he were swelling.

But instead of the outburst Jeremy had expected, the lizard, as he had begun to call his alleged brother, merely unswelled, made a dry clicking sound with his tongue against his teeth, and turned his back on them both. He sat down at his writing table and looked out across Pulldan Park.

He was Lord of Pulldan now! The thought sent a thrill of chill pride through him.

What a fool that brother of his was! This wild business was just like him. And yet, what an insult! He turned and, ignoring Olivia, said briefly, as though the matter were self evident and needed no argument:

"I cannot see that any end will be served by this fraud. You will leave the castle at once. I don't know why you ever came. If you choose to live in my brother's rooms in town in his name, I suppose I cannot stop you. But I can have you watched. Once you step outside the bounds of the bargain, I'll have you arrested. Now go."

"Oh, you men!" said Olivia. "My dear Philip, what do you think you can gain by talking like that? Can't you see that you're in this now? Can't you see we're all in it? You can send Mr. Laytree away. That's easy. But you can't bring Arthur back. Only Arthur can do that. You drove Arthur away before. So that he was not here when father died.

You don't suppose that made you any more popular, do you? Are you going to do the same again?"

"Damn you," said Lord Amlett, under his breath to Jeremy. "Damn you."

"Carry on," said Jeremy. "I can give a rough guess how you're feeling. It'll get better soon. It hurts a lot at first."

Olivia pushed her advantage home.

"All the servants have seen him arrive. If he goes away now there'll be a scandal. They'll say you've driven him away from his father's funeral. It won't look decent. Besides, who knows what Arthur may be up to? He knows best how much secrecy is essential. You know what he is at times. You'll have to lump it!"

The fear that he should get the reputation of having driven his own brother away from his father's funeral, appalled the new Lord Amlett. He could see there was no hope for it. This man would have to stay.

"May I butt in for a moment," said Laytree, and as he spoke, Lord Amlett marveled yet again at the extraordinary likeness between this man and his brother. Only a very near relation would suspect the truth. Perhaps it might be pulled off. If the trick was not discovered, no one need suffer. He did not mind, so long as he was not found out.

"Well?"

"It's just this," said Jeremy. "I fell in with your brother's suggestion because he was a sportsman. I didn't realize then that my presence here would be about as welcome as a boll-weevil in a cotton patch.

I hoped that the welcome would have been written in letters of gold on the mat. And it wasn't. They had had it specially unpicked. I'm not wanted. I happen to be rather a sensitive plant. I curl up at the edges in the east wind, so to speak. You've shown me pretty clearly that you loathe the sight of me. I'm sorry and all that. But it gives me the willies. I'm off. Back where I came from. The bargain's off. I'm sorry for your sake, Olivia. I thought we might have been good pals. But—good-by."

"Stop!" said Lord Amlett, seriously alarmed now. "You can't go. The servants have all seen you. The station-master's seen you. The chauffeur's seen you."

"Well, what does that matter?" said Jeremy. "After all, what am I supposed to be? Merely the younger son. I don't matter as much as all that."

"You silly ass," said Lord Amlett, unbending in the rush of his anxiety. "Don't you realize the position? You're the heir to the title now!"

As the realization of this burst upon him for the first time, Jeremy turned cold all over. He stood silent for a while, and then turned away.

"Ah, well!" he said hopelessly. "I'll stay."

He turned to go. The butler entered with a telegram for his Lordship.

Lord Amlett wanted a further word with Jeremy. The butler being there was a nuisance rather. He'd have to stop Jeremy.

"I say," he called.

Jeremy took no notice. After all, he had a name, even if it was not his own.

"Just a minute!" said Lord Amlett again.

Jeremy was at the door.

"I say, Arthur!" called Lord Amlett.

Jeremy turned. When the butler had gone, he looked at Lord Amlett and murmured softly: "You can pay that fifty pounds to one of the ex-service men's funds. You said it very nicely!"

"Confound you!" said Lord Amlett.

CHAPTER IV

THE funeral was over; the innumerable hordes of near and distant relations of the great family of the Arthurtons had come and gone. None of them had spotted the difference between Jeremy and the absent Arthur. The new Lord Amlett had gone up to London to look after affairs, and Jeremy, the cuckoo in the nest, the supposed heir, was carrying on. He was beginning to grow used to the rôle by now and able to avoid the more obvious mistakes. Olivia had helped him to avoid quarrelling finally with his supposed brother, and if only they could have reckoned on the real Arthur turning up, they would have had nothing to worry about.

Olivia was puzzling things out that fine early autumn morning as she rode round the corner of the stables. She nearly always rode before breakfast. The swift, vigorous exercise put her in a good temper with the world, made life feel worth living. She glanced up at the windows of the blue room. That was still Jeremy's room. He was fast asleep probably. She would rather have liked . . . She tightened her rein, pulled her horse's head gently round and cantered off. What she would rather have liked she did not admit even to herself, a form of mental evasion which had happened more than once lately. The more she saw of Jeremy the better she liked him. She liked his cheerful courage, his frankness, his kindly irony and wit; she liked his self-con-

trol, she liked his capable-looking hands and the way his hair rumpled in the wind; she liked the quaint air of wistfulness which came over him when he was in a tight corner, and she liked his swift matter-of-fact actions when there was any danger. They had been exploring a distant part of the Park together one day, where the remains of an early Saxon Church were rapidly disappearing beneath the ivy. They had climbed up to the top, she had slipped, fallen, and then felt herself supported as by a miracle. He had not said anything until she was safe beside him on the tower again. "Just like the ivy," he said with a grin.

"What?"

"I cling to you. That's how it goes on, isn't it?"

"You saved my life," she said with a little shiver. She didn't like to think of herself all broken up at the bottom of the scarp.

"Nonsense," said Jeremy. "Saved you a bad bump. Let's buzz on. This is not our lucky spot."

That was more or less the way he treated everything. She pondered the events of the past few weeks as she rode down the clearing. The misty sunshine clung round her like a veil, as she sat straight-backed, beautiful, her bobbed chestnut curls tossing slightly as she moved to her horse's movement.

She wondered whether Jeremy could ever take anything seriously—even himself, or what was more important, herself. She had tried to make him talk about his future, but he dodged that every time. All he would say was that he had no future, and that when the real Arthur Arthurton returned, he,

Jeremy, would probably go back to Africa to work out his own salvation.

"You know I can't help feeling," he said with mock gravity, "that prospective heir to Pulldan Castle is, in my case anyway, a blind alley occupation! It's not going to lead anywhere much, I mean!"

She only wished that she had that cheerful spirit here beside her now.

Before Jeremy had arrived she had never been lonely. She had been accustomed to being alone for days at the Castle, busy with her gardens, her horses, her books and so on.

Now all that had changed. She wanted Jeremy to be with her, to share any interest, to take part in any fun there might be. Poor old Jeremy! She would have liked him to be with her, but perhaps he was better off where he was. After all, only in the privacy of his bedroom could he be frankly careless, and feel safe from possible discovery. She put her horse to a gallop, and then in the distance caught the sound of following hoof beats. Who could be out at that time? She shot ahead, swerved into a clearing, and waited.

Down the long ride thundered Jeremy, riding his hardest. He had caught a glimpse of her from his window, had seen her glance towards him, pause, and then ride off. That was enough. He dressed like a cyclone, dashed down to the stables, and was off after her. He glimpsed her far off through the trees in the thin sunlight, saw her put her horse to the gallop, and raced after her. Then she disappeared.

He thundered on, only to overshoot her hiding place. He heard her laugh, he reined in, bore round upon her.

"Good morning, sir!" she laughed.

"Good morning, madam!"

"You lie abed late, sir!"

"Madam, I was up at the first glance of the sun upon my window!" he bowed.

"You do it very well. You might almost be eighteenth century."

"I don't feel it. I'll race you to the lodge?"

"No. I'd rather talk. You know Philip is coming back at the week-end?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Don't you think you ought to go?"

"Yes, I do. I can't see this place gives a hoot whether I'm here or not. It won't do Arthur any good or any harm whether I go or stay. The spoof is less likely to be found out in London than here. I won't have to guard every moment against letting something slip. It will be better all round. There's the complete quitter's creed for you in one dose."

"Yes, I suppose it is," she said absently.

They rode a while in silence.

"You put up a perfect case for going away," she said. "There seems no answer to it."

"Pardon me. I don't put it up. It puts itself up. It keeps on doing it. It gets between me and the golden slumbers that ought to be adding to my beauty. It looks at me from the crested plate on the dinner table. It hovers behind the butler's honest face. I can't escape the beastly thing. The

whole gladsome world unites in an anthem, the first words of which are 'Beat it, little stranger, while the going is good.' "

"It's not really as bad as that?"

"It's worse. It is only my natural reluctance to express myself that prevents me from putting it into words."

"I hadn't noticed the natural reluctance."

"No. I fight against it! If I didn't suffer from an inability to put my thoughts into words, I could draw a picture of myself which would bring tears to the eyes of a sergeant major. But really, I'm quite serious. Everything about Pulldan seems to have 'Danger' written on it for my special benefit."

She smiled across at him as they rode. She had never met a man quite like him before. In her eyes, he was nothing whatever like her brother. It was a continual miracle that everybody did not see at once the startling differences. The two temperaments were entirely different. Arthur, for example, was inclined to be selfish and obstinate, Jeremy rarely thought of himself first. Jeremy, too, was all fun and laughter, and in spite of his whimsical description of his difficulties, which were very real, had never let those difficulties interfere with his irresistible high spirits.

"There's one thing, by the way . . ." she began.

"Shoot!"

"You talk too much. Arthur was less frank than you. The Arthurtons are not given to overmuch conversation. And when Arthur talks, he . . . well, he's like most men. He doesn't give himself away. For instance, I had cold shivers that night

at the Mainterlys' when you told us all about that rather delightful man, Jennifer. I was certain that you'd give yourself away. Supposing any one there had known Jennifer for example?"

"I was quite sure they didn't know Jennifer; dear old Jennifer with his wife and family sprang fully armed from a fertile brain. You may search the country houses of Sussex, and you will find no trace of the man Jennifer. There may be Jennifers, but not my Jennifer. He's my own particular creation. He was very useful."

"I'm sorry about that," she smiled. "I was quite fond of him. He sounded such a jolly sort of man."

"Yes. It's a pity about Jennifer. He was a good chap while he lasted. But I'm afraid I shall never see him again. You see he invested all his money in an ostrich farm, and it failed. He was sold up, and I believe he has emigrated to Nova Scotia or somewhere."

"You really are the limit. Why bother to invent any more?"

"Well. I was sorry for Jennifer. I like to think of him in Nova Scotia, with a fleet of codfish boats, bringing up his children to the cod fisheries . . ."

"Stop. Stop . . . you're hopeless. I think that you're right. You'd better go."

"It seems to be moved and seconded, all right. After all, the reasons are pretty strong."

"I suppose you really want to go? That's why your reasons are so excellent."

"No. It's the other way about. I don't want to go. I'm fond of Pulldan. I'm growing used to the life. I'm able to see the funny side of it—all."

"Is that all?" she asked simply.

"Well . . . as a matter of fact . . . it isn't. I don't think I need tell you the rest. But I may as well. We're not eighteenth century. And if we come up against the immovable post, well, perhaps we've got the courage to admit it, and the self-control to be able to talk about it. Well, in plain twentieth century, *you're* the rest, Olivia. Sorry for my beastly cheek and all that, but I can't help it!"

Steady hand on rein, steady eyes fixed upon the distance, a profile set and composed, steady, steady —and 'ware wire!

There was no answer for so long that he went on. "I know the idea has its funny side too. I can see that. But I can't appreciate it somehow. You see, I . . . liked you when I first saw you. That was why I wanted to give the whole business up, and that was why I wanted to go on. Anyway, now you know, Olivia."

Still she did not answer him. From her attitude, from her expression, he could get no inkling of what she was thinking. The horses ambled on, picking their way unchecked along the sun-dappled rides of the wood.

"Listen. I came to England to find myself. I have no position whatever. I came from the outer darkness. For one brief moment, I am passing through the outer atmosphere, and consequently am shining like a shooting star. In a little while, I shall cease to shine, and find my way to outer darkness again. I came to look for a place in the world for myself, for work to do; to renew the tradition that once bound the Laytrees to England. Being a

chuckle-headed idiot, I fell in with your brother's plan, instead of clearing a plot for myself. I have just about as much place in the world as a commercial traveler, who doesn't travel for anything. Well then, that's that. And this is this. Extra. On top of all that when I saw you that morning in your brother's flat, I felt . . . I don't know . . . I was going to say blithered, but that's not what I mean. Only a lot of things that had mattered very much before, didn't seem to matter at all then. Some things mattered more. I don't know whether you can see what I mean.

"But Jennifer, for example. I envied that ghostly gentleman, with his nice old house and his place in Sussex, and his wife and kiddies. I built Jennifer up out of nothing. But there was a nasty little sting for me in spite of the funny side of it. Jennifer, though he didn't exist, yet had all the things I was aiming at . . ."

He paused, and after a while added:

"Good old Jennifer. I hope he likes codfish!"

He reined in his horse, caught the reins of Olivia's horse, brought them both to a standstill, and turned in his saddle.

"Well?" he said, with a grave smile in which there was more than a hint of mischief. "Now you know. What about it? If it's the bird, say so quickly and I'll take a single ticket to anywhere. Well?"

"It's not the bird!" she answered softly, and then fearful lest things should rip out of control, held up her hand.

"Wait, Jeremy! It's all so very wonderful that I want to be very careful about it. I wanted you to

say something—oh, so badly—but remember it's all got to be kept very secret. Watch your eyes, Jeremy, they'll give you away first every time—and don't watch mine . . . oh! . . . well, you may, just one . . . if there is no one looking. Oh, Jeremy!"

. . . . . .

They rode on together in the busy silence of the wood, not speaking, each thinking hard of that kiss, so swift in its coming, so full of possibilities and yet —and yet—and yet— There were doubts in both their minds.

Jeremy was keeping a tight hold over himself. He hadn't said very much. He couldn't in the nature of the case. "My path is not exactly a primrose one as it is," he was thinking. "If I've got to watch my eyes as well as my step, my goose is cooked from now on, and there'll be ructions. Besides, it's not exactly fair to the Honorable Arthur. He wanted me as a temporary cuckoo, not as a permanent brother-in-law. Wash out."

Olivia's thoughts were even less pleasant, less certain. She had sensed at once his hesitation. She was disappointed. To her mind, love came first, and then, sharp on the heels of that thought came the swift reminder, "Not before loyalty." Could she be sure that it was loyalty that was holding him back? Wouldn't it be better if the incident in the sunlit glade had never happened?

They came to their conclusions together.

"Olivia," said Jeremy, reining in.

"Jeremy," said Olivia at the same moment.

"Go on," said Jeremy.

"No, you," said Olivia.

"Ladies first."

"Not over fences!"

"All right then. My last thought was wash out!"

"Delightfully vague. I suppose you mean we've been and gone and done it."

"Yes. Take back the heart that thou gavest, and all that sort of bilge. What's your jolly old motto? *Soyez Sage,* isn't it, which means 'mind your step'?"

"Roughly, I suppose it does. Very roughly."

"It's near enough. You see, Olivia, it's pretty rough going already. I'm snooped from behind every corner as it is. I think that we'd better regard that little idyll down the lane as nonexistent. We'll pretend we were still eighteenth century, and that now we're grown up in the full flower of the twentieth, and I'm nothing but a cuckoo. For three months. I won't give the blighter longer than three months. If he doesn't come back and own up . . . I'll . . ."

"You'll what?"

"Dashed if I know," said Jeremy ruefully.

"You are a dear," she said for no apparent reason. "But I agree."

They rode on again in silence. Then—

"I say, Jeremy?"

"Yes, sister dear."

"You needn't rub it in. Tell me. When Arthur comes back, we start level, eh?"

"Oh, yes. Rather. More than that, even. Oh, yes!"

They shook hands on it, rode on out of the Park, and across a grassy road.

"We won't go back for breakfast. Let's go on to

Mrs. Mellidew's farm. She'll give us some new milk and some scones. We can go back by the circular road, round the hill."

"Righto! Anything you like. I'm not anxious to get back, I can assure you."

Mrs. Mellidew lived in a cottage on the far side of the Pulldan Estate. She had nearly everything the mind of man could desire.

She lived practically rent free. The cottage itself dated from Tudor days, and was a perfect specimen of its kind. Artists came to sketch it, and architects, thinking of housing schemes and their results, burst into tears upon beholding it. The bench outside Mrs. Mellidew's door was old, old oak, and motorists gnashed their teeth when she refused to sell it for a song.

The furniture in her cottage was surprisingly beautiful. There was a set of chairs with scooped seats for example, which had been in her family for hundreds of years; there was an old oak dower-chest, curiously carved. The grandfather's clock had a painted beflowered dial, and the table in her parlor was of that wonderful rose mahogany which antique dealers imperil their immortal souls to obtain.

In a shed at the bottom of the garden there was a small oil engine which supplied electric light and did all the pumping.

All their food came from the gardens; she baked her own bread; the eggs came straight from the nest, and the milk they drank reminded one of the golden days.

She did not want for money. She lived a peace-

ful, happy life, set in the slow, moving beauty of the countryside.

"Has it ever struck you, Mrs. Mellidew, that you ought to be very happy?" said Jeremy, as they sat in the sun outside her door.

"Eh, now, Master Arthur. Happiness hasn't much to do with ought to be. It's mostly 'might be,' I think with most people. They do rush about so. I don't know what the world's coming to, that I don't. Nobody never seems to set 'emselves down and enjoy it all. Always wanting something new. Would you believe it? We had a man here yesterday saying that didn't I feel lonely and cut off and all that, and wouldn't I like the wireless! What do you think of that? The wireless, eh! Did you ever hear of such a thing? I believe Mellidew would like it, you know. Men are all the same. They're just like a lot of babies."

"And I'll bet Mellidew said that it would be nice for you, eh?"

"Well, he did. That's just what he did say. Trying to persuade me that it was all for me he wanted it. Why, I can remember when you was only that high, sir, you did just the same yourself. Tried to persuade your father that he'd like a model railway running round the gardens. Eh, yes, you did!"

Jeremy glanced nervously at Olivia. Reminiscences were dangerous ground. He nudged her slightly.

"And to think how times change," the old woman went on. "I was only saying to Mellidew last night when he came in from the milking, to think that we should see Master Philip grown up and taking the

title. He ought to marry, that he did, and there's many a one would have him."

"Hardly a marrying man, you know, Mrs. Mellidew," said Jeremy. "My brother never was one for the ladies."

"He left that to you, sir, I'll be bound," said the old woman. "You'll be married before him, that you will. I heard from Hopkins, who's groom at the Hall now, that Lady Dorothy came back last night. Eh! now! you needn't look surprised! I warrant you knew all about it long since, sir. And perhaps you'll find her in if you go a little further. No use telling you the road, eh, sir!" The old woman chuckled richly over her joke, over what she believed was a pretended expression of surprise. "Dash it all," thought Jeremy. "It is funny, if only I could see it. One snag per hour seems to be my ration nowadays. And she thinks I am putting it on! My aunt! Putting it on! Phew!"

"Er, they're not all so intimate as Mrs. Mellidew, by any chance?" he asked, as they rode on. "My sense of humor won't stand much more of that!"

"Oh, Mrs. Mellidew's all right," said Olivia. "You see, she nursed both you and Philip!"

"She did, did she? That was very charming of her. You see my memories of my youth are rather dim. They'll put me in the cart one of these fine days. I do hope there's no nonsense about strawberry marks, or kissing spots?"

"There may be," said Olivia cheerfully, "but you won't be asked to show them."

"N.B. Don't go bathing if Mrs. Mellidew is about," said Jeremy. "I'd better go back to Lon-

don quick. And, I say, about Lady Dorothy! Are we really anywhere near her place? I'd really rather not. I mean, I'll be delighted for her to marry Arthur and all that, but if she's as near as all that, don't you think we'd better go home and look up the trains?"

"Don't get panicky," said Olivia. "She's quite charming really. Do you see those chimneys just peeping over the top of the trees in the hollow? That's the Hall. She lives there. She is very restless. We may even meet her on the road. You've got to do it sometime."

"Yes. But some other time. Not this time. I should hate to spoil a charming morning."

The sudden threat of Lady Dorothy's nearness completed his discomfiture. He felt that at any cost he must avoid a meeting. He was a rotten conspirator anyway, and this was something for which Arthur Arthurton had not prepared him. In the bustle and hurry of their departure from London, he had forgotten all about Olivia's mention of the lady. Now she suddenly loomed large, blotting out the sunshine. "The bare thought of it makes me feel helpless," he muttered.

"We'll go back then," said Olivia, "but it will have to come. Oh, look, what's that?"

She pointed up the hill. About a mile away, they could see a trap drawn by a powerful white horse. It seemed to be proceeding at a fantastic speed down the hill, describing parabolas with alternate wheels. They could not see who was in the trap. It was too far away for that. But just beyond where they had stopped, the road turned back on itself in a hairpin

bend, with a dead stone wall blocking the straight run.

"Runaway," said Jeremy. "Nasty mess up. I hate a mess." He jumped from his horse, and handed the reins to Olivia.

"Put the horses in that field, out of harm's way. We don't want a circus."

"And you?"

"I'm going to stop it."

"Jeremy, you can't."

"I'm going to try. It's worth it." There was no time for more. He ran up the hill to meet the frantic horse. As he turned to run beside it, he caught a glimpse of a slender figure of a woman with big eyes, in which there was no fear. She was bearing with all her strength and weight upon the reins, but the horse was her master. Jeremy caught the flying strap, felt himself jerked off his feet, banged, bumped, and whirled through the air. He had just missed the shaft, and had a good grip which he could hold. The wall was a hundred yards away. The pace of the horse slackened; the beast jibbed, swerved, dropped a wheel of the trap along the ditch side, recovered, but plunged again. This time the wheel went in, the trap described one last perfect curve, and overturned, twisting the animal with it. There was a loud crash of splintering wood, and then silence. Jeremy crawled out of the ditch and felt himself all over. "Yes, I'm still here," he said, "but only just. Now where's the lady, if any?"

He found her lying still and white in the dry ditch a little distance away. She had been thrown

out a second or two before the trap went over, which accident had undoubtedly saved her. She was unconscious.

"Get a doctor or something," shouted Jeremy to Olivia. "Quick as you can."

"Is she dead?" called Olivia, as she started off.

"Not on your life. But buck up, there's a dear. I've crocked my leg or I'd go. No. It's nothing much. But do buck up."

Left alone with the unknown lady, he looked about for some water. He bathed her forehead and her cheeks, careful not to make a mess of her more than he could help. He slapped her hands, and did several other obvious and futile things.

"I've wasted my youth," he murmured. "I ought to have been a boy scout. Here's my daily good turn arrived, and I don't know what to do with it!

"Wait a minute, though. I believe she's coming round. That's the style. Every day in every way you're getting better and better. Keep on saying it over and over again. Ah! there you are then! That's better."

The unknown opened her big eyes, let them rest upon him for a moment, and then breathed one word.

"Arthur!"

She closed her eyes again.

"That, Mr. Arthur Jeremy Arthurton Laytree has put the lid on it. When she opens her eyes again, you've got to say Dorothy! There's no doubt about it. It's happened. I knew it would. This is what comes of philandering on a sunshiny morning, when

the world is full of man-traps. This is about the worst parcel I've had yet. The trenches were nothing to it."

The lady opened her eyes once again.

"Arthur!" she whispered.

"Dorothy!" said Jeremy in a choked voice.

Again she closed her eyes. Soon she would come to completely, be mistress of herself, and of the situation. What was he to do?

The precious seconds sped away, each one leaving him more helpless than before.

He wanted to run away, but his legs were paralyzed. Besides, what good would that do? He could run for a doctor? No, he couldn't. Olivia had ridden for a doctor. What an ass he had been to ask her to go! If he had gone himself, he could have put off the evil moment a little longer, made up his mind to it, arranged something to say. A chaffinch settled on a twig in the hedge and chirruped at him blithely. It looked so cheekily self-possessed, its waistcoat was so prim and sleek, and its note so joyously content, that the mere sight of it infuriated him.

"Shoo!" he said aloud. "Shoo! Go away, I don't like you. Shoo!"

The bird went suddenly in a fine, careless curve behind the hedge.

"What *are* you doing?" came Lady Dorothy's voice.

"Oh . . . er . . . nothing . . . it was a bird. I thought it would annoy you. Very annoying things, birds sometimes . . . that is . . . er . . . are you all right?"

"Yes. I think so. I hope so. I just feel very tired. That will pass."

"Oh, yes. That will pass. Just rest quietly and don't talk. Close your eyes. Have a little nap if you feel like it. It'll do you good. I'll keep the birds off!"

"You are absurd! As if . . . You've saved my life! Funny, isn't it!"

"Yes. It is. Jolly funny. Ha! Ha! But don't you worry about that. Here, let me make you more comfortable." He took off his coat, rolled it up, and put it beneath her head.

"I'm all right," she said softly. "Really I am."

"Jolly good," said Jeremy, avoiding her smile. "Jolly good."

"Arthur," she whispered. "Aren't you going to kiss me?"

CHAPTER V

"AREN'T you going to kiss me, Arthur?"

The words buzzed in his ears like flies, and, he reflected bitterly, he had nothing wherewith to swat them. What could he say? A brilliant idea crossed his mind.

"There, there!" he said, stroking her hand with an air of great concern. "You mustn't have any excitement, you know!"

It didn't sound so brilliant after all. In fact it sounded incredibly feeble.

Lady Dorothy's large lustrous eyes opened yet a little wider, as though she were puzzled.

"The horse!" cried Jeremy, struck by another brilliant idea. He would go to the rescue of the horse. But that unfortunate animal did not need his assistance. Before riding off for the doctor, Olivia had slashed the harness free, and the brute which had so nearly killed both itself and its mistress was peacefully cropping the grass a dozen yards away. Jeremy scratched his head, looked all round him as though seeking inspiration from the empty fields and woods and finding none.

"Up-to-date horse," he said ruefully as he turned. "Doesn't need anybody's help. Quite independent . . . Er . . . a mare . . . of course. What?" He grinned at her.

"I say, you are looking better. What a lark, eh? When the old doctor-Johnny comes tootling along, he won't have anything to do."

"The old doctor-Johnny won't find it such a lark perhaps. You seem in wonderful spirits!"

"Well, wouldn't anybody be! To be in England on a morning like this is enough to make any one bubble a bit. You know

'Spring's at eleven
The lark's on the thorn
Morning's at seven
The snail in the morn.'

I never could get my quotations right."

"Please!" she said in mock seriousness. "Don't quote Browning!"

"I wasn't!"

"No, but don't try to. He's such a back number."

"Highbrow?" thought Jeremy. "This looks like deep water. I'd better give her a leg up and postpone this conversation until such time as I can find out how much the Honorable Arthur was supposed to know. Suppose he was in the habit of quoting poetry to her? That would be a number one snag. Browning, eh? Well, that was more than I knew."

"Besides, it was all wrong. Browning is bad enough. Yours was more like an acrostic."

"My memory's not what it was, you know . . . er . . . here. . . . Let me jolt you into a civilized position. If I put my arm round you like this"—Lady Dorothy settled into the curve of his arm with some satisfaction—"and you put your arm round my neck like that"—again she complied—"and then

heave ho and let go the anchor. Voilà. You can stand alone." He released her waist, and stood away from her. She smiled faintly.

"That was very nicely done. You *are* strong, you know."

She swayed slightly as she stood. It was obvious that she had been shaken more violently than she would admit.

Jeremy, looking at her now for the first time in cold blood, as it were, could not quite fathom what was strange in this woman who had thus been pitchforked into his life. Her eyes were a little too big, and her mouth a trifle too small; her face had a well-disciplined air, as though any emotion which might be permitted to show itself there had been carefully prepared according to official instructions before being issued. It was her hair which was most strange. It was of a fine pale gold, so pale as to look bleached (which it was), and shingled within an inch of its life. It did not look masculine, for it was too fantastic for that, but it lent a peremptory air to the proud disciplined expression of her face.

"A rum fish," was Jeremy's conclusion, "and not the sort for any monkey tricks. If she finds out I'm not her beloved Arthur she'll boil me in oil at the least. She's intelligent, too intelligent, in fact, but what's the good of intelligence if it doesn't enable the intelligent one to distinguish between a cuckoo and the real thing?"

"Can you walk?" he asked her.

"Yes."

"Perhaps we'd better walk up towards the Hall. Hello, here's the car. Olivia's been jolly quick."

"It's my car," said Lady Dorothy. "She's been to the Hall, I suppose, and telephoned from there."

"Brainy girl, Olivia," said Jeremy, looking up the road towards the approaching car.

"Is she? You didn't think so before."

"Didn't I? Then I must have been a thundering idiot. I've got more sense now."

"That's one for you, my Honorable friend Arthur," he added under his breath.

It was a curious situation in the car. Olivia drove, and Jeremy and Lady Dorothy occupied the back seat.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" said Jeremy.

"Do. And I'd appreciate one myself. If you open that flap on your left, you'll find the case. That's it. Now light it for me!"

He leaned forward to touch the end of the cigarette with the match. She seemed to be very close to him; he caught the perfume of clove, saw those big, deep eyes softening, and yet with a hint of hard obstinacy in their depths. She smiled, and then drew in a deep draught of comforting smoke.

"You shouldn't inhale," said Jeremy.

"Do you inhale?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"Don't be illogical . . . If I smoke I smoke, and I do it properly. You said that as though you believed all women merely smoked because it's rather a jolly fad. They don't. Most of us smoke because we like it. It's no use being Victorian about it."

"No," said Jeremy, contemplating her ruthlessly shingled head. "I suppose it isn't. Er . . . it's not

exactly the word I'd apply to you. You're not exactly Victorian. Oh, no."

"What am I then?"

"I hardly know," said Jeremy. "I'm not going to start chucking labels about."

She was still very close to him, rather closer than the occasion seemed to warrant, until he remembered that he was supposed to be engaged to her, and that this was their first meeting for some time.

"Yet I must have a label," said Lady Dorothy. "For instance, when I asked you to kiss me. That was fairly Victorian, wasn't it?"

Here was the thing again! Jeremy looked at Olivia's back, and wished she would turn round, or do something.

"I suppose it was," he said. "But you might as well call it Elizabethan, or prehistoric or any other old thing."

"And you didn't do it!" said Lady Dorothy. "Why was that? Purely modern, I should say. From what I know of prehistoric customs, they would have leaped at the chance. Nor would the Elizabethans have been quite so backward. They were knights-errant in those days. Even a Victorian would have kissed my hand."

"Pathetic picture you paint, really, you know," said Jeremy, mischievously. "Modern beauty sighing for the return of the good old times."

She looked at him, dispassionately almost. The light had gone out of those big eyes, and she tapped impatiently upon the window ledge.

"Heigh ho!" she said, in mock playfulness. "We are talking a lot of nonsense."

"I should think we are," agreed Jeremy, but he congratulated himself on having negotiated an awkward corner.

"By the skin of my precious teeth," he thought as the car turned in at the gate.

A groom and two stablemen were sent down to collect the horse and the smashed trap, and Lady Dorothy excused herself while she changed and made herself presentable.

"Well?" said Olivia while they were waiting for her to return. They were sitting on the loggia, a cool, wholly delightful place of marble, looking out across the lawn to a sunken water garden where a fountain played.

"Well, what?" said Jeremy. "She asked me to kiss her. I say, you know. It's pretty low down all this. After all, if she's engaged to him she's got a right to be kissed."

"Well?" said Olivia.

"Well, I can't do it. I may be a cuckoo, but I can't go about obtaining kisses under false pretenses. And besides . . . you know there's nothing gives a man away so easily as a kiss. I mean all men have their own vintage, so to speak. She'd have known in a second that I was merely an understudy. So I jibbed."

"But, my dear Jeremy, you can't go on jibbing."

"I jolly well can. I am—on this occasion anyway—the world's champion jibber. I may be said to hold the world's record for jibbing. I rescue my fiancée from the very jaws of the local saw-bones one minute, and jib the next. I'm pretty good considering that I haven't had much practice."

"You speak as though the jibbing was done. I have an idea it may be rather—well—delicate. It's no use. Tact is not your strong point. You haven't the right touch. You're much too nice."

"Ah, for the wiles of a good old-fashioned serpent —or even the wings of a dove. Any old dove would do."

"Well, you'll have to be fairly quick, you know. You haven't much time."

"It's the anticipation that's causing all the breeze," said Jeremy ruefully. "If I could only dash in—you know, plenty of bonhomie and a soupçon of camaraderie—be a sister to her—you know the sort of thing . . . Dash it all, you might help me a bit instead of laughing at me. This is a jolly serious business. It needs a firm hand. And I feel about as firm as a jelly left over from last night's party."

"I thought you were the champion jibber."

"Yes. But now I come to think of it, I don't know very much about jibbing. I was on the classical side, you know. We didn't do jibbing. Not an awful lot . . . Christmas Eve! I've had a brain wave! . . . I believe it would . . . why, of course! That's the solution. I knew I'd solve it. Now look here. What's to stop my breaking the engagement? Then I could jib until further orders! Dash it all, Olivia, you must see my difficulty. In the car —and I thought that ride would never come to an end—I was about as happy as Guy Fawkes on Bonfire night."

"What did you do?"

"Do? I flatter myself I came out of it brilliantly. As the Americans say, I put over a line of talk that'd make Orpheus look silly. No, seriously, I jibbed. We discussed the Elizabethans and prehistoric men. She said there were no knights-errant nowadays."

"But you were a knight-errant. After all, you carried out the rescue."

"Yes, but there is no instance on record where the knight-errant rescued the dragon. That's what I seem to have done."

He paced to and fro upon the loggia, thinking of that early morning ride in the woods, of their kiss, of their momentary happiness among the rush of difficulties. Why couldn't it always be like that? Why was it that each time he saw something infinitely desirable, some unforeseen mischance stepped in and changed all the conditions of the game?

"I've no luck, you know, really," he said. "I expect if I break the engagement, I can at least hope she won't have me for breach of promise. That would be comic! Except for that, I can't see what there is to stop me."

"It's an idea. But there's Lady Dorothy. She'd probably stop you. And Arthur's very fond of her, you know."

"Then it won't do him any harm to be engaged all over again when he comes back. He'll probably like it. Think what a nice surprise it will be for him when he comes back. I'd like to leave a surprise or two for him, the blighter. He's left enough and to spare for me."

"How will you set about breaking it?"

"I don't know. I could put an advertisement in the *Times,* you know. I suppose she reads the *Times?*"

"Don't be an ass, Jeremy! If you really are going to break the engagement—and I wouldn't stop you if you think that's the easiest way—you'd better have her to yourself and do it now. I'll go back to the Castle and leave you to square things up. Do it now!"

"Here. I say. Don't rush it. Don't go off like that. I'll be all over the shop. I don't know anything about her. By the way—here, you mustn't go—I can't face it just now. Tell me this. Did my honorable double quote poetry very much?"

"What on earth . . ."

"I started to quote some Browning to her this morning when I was stumped for something to say, and I made an awful hash of it. She looked as though it hurt her more than it did me, and begged me not to quote Browning. I suddenly saw breakers ahead!"

"I never thought of that. Yes, Arthur was very fond of poetry. All modern stuff, by the way. You'll either have to break off the engagement right away or swot up the Sitwells and some Drinkwater, a bit of Housman and Masefield, to say nothing of Siegfried Sassoon and one or two others. There are one or two anthologies in your room. They belong to Arthur. You'd better know something about them anyway."

Jeremy groaned and passed a damp hand across a damper forehead.

"This is the most ghastly blow yet," he said.

"I'm bound to wreck the whole show now from the word 'Go.'"

"Then break off the engagement. There is no alternative."

"Couldn't I have a lapse of memory?"

"Short of going into a nursing home, I don't see what you can do," said Olivia, who was tickled at the prospect of the unfortunate Jeremy solemnly learning yards of poetry as part of his new intellectual make-up. Secretly, she would have preferred to see him break the engagement right away. She didn't wish to share him in any way with Lady Dorothy. She did not approve very highly of that nervous and rather spoiled child of aristocracy and wealth. She found her fantasies trying and not too sincere; her continual seeking after novelty in art and life seemed to be a sign of weakness. Olivia herself was frank, sometimes almost shockingly outspoken, but absolutely sincere. She had no pose, intellectual or otherwise. If she liked a thing, whether it was a picture or a poem or a person, she said so, paying no attention whatever to the fashionable whim of the moment. Lady Dorothy strove always to be modern, to be on the crest of the very latest wave. It was part of her smoldering dissatisfaction with life. For Lady Dorothy had everything and found it insufficient. She did not know really what it was she lacked, but she was soon to discover her deficiency. In all her life, she had never known a real overmastering emotion; she had never felt that there was one aim in her existence which, if not realized, would leave the rest of the world barren and tasteless. She had never loved anything. Her af-

fection for the Honorable Arthur Arthurton had been the first faint hint of reality. They had become engaged, and then, strangely enough, the thrill she had expected had not come. She had realized, slowly but with bitter certainty, that this was not really love.

She wanted more than this. She had gone away, and during her restless wanderings had come to invest the absent Arthur with a glow of romance. Perhaps she had been wrong. Perhaps love would come to her. It might be, slowly. She had wired to Arthur at his rooms that she was returning, and had hurried back.

Then things had begun to happen, and her first sight of him was in the height of that emotional moment after the smash in the trap. In that moment, she had felt strangely moved. After all there was something about this man that was not like other men. His attitude had puzzled her. She could not for a moment place his good-humored banter. She missed little personal notes of remembered intimacies; she was puzzled slightly by mannerisms she had not noticed before. But, and this it was that filled her mind with curious exaltation, the faint touch of romance that had grown round the figure of the absent Arthur while she had been away, persisted, strengthened, deepened and took a firm hold upon her mind at each contact with the unfortunate impostor, Jeremy.

As she made herself tidy, and, by the way, wholly delightful to look upon in her room, she thought of her lover waiting for her below. She chose a simple crêpe de chine frock of palest amber, for she had

no intention of going out again that day, and was determined to have her lover stay to lunch. She wore no jewelry, remembering that Arthur did not like it. He must care for her. He must come to feel for her the same warm intensely personal emotion she was beginning to feel for him. She stood looking at herself in the mirror.

Yes, she was beautiful, strikingly beautiful. He should tell her so. . . .

Down on the loggia, the supposed Arthur waited, his heart in his boots, trying to choose words in which to break off his engagement. He would have to do it. Olivia had left him, with messages of apology, so that he might have a clear field for the painful and difficult task. How the dickens did one break off an engagement anyway?

Dash it! There was somebody coming over the lawn. Rum looking joker too! Perhaps it was only a gardener. But gardeners didn't wander about the lawns at that time of the day, smoking ancient briar pipes and wearing the most outrageously untidy clothes.

It must be some pal of Lady Dorothy's. Funny old geeser he looked. He wore riding breeches, stockings and shoes, an old baggy, discolored sporting jacket, and a hat that ought to have belonged to a scarecrow. Jeremy pretended not to notice him, and turning idly away, went as if to enter the house.

"Hi!" shouted the stranger.

"Hi yourself," thought Jeremy. "I'm deaf. Oh! why did I let Olivia leave me? I don't know who this may be!"

"Hi! Arthurton," came the voice again.

"He knows me!" He turned back.

"'Pon my soul! Haven't seen you for an age! Where's my daughter, eh? you wag! Knew you'd be here soon. What? And a fine morning you've got for it too. Eh? What's that? Where is she?"

"This, you poor Mutt," said Jeremy to himself, "is obviously the Earl of Tray, Lady Dorothy's estimable papa. Think of something, you fathead."

"Er! . . . oh . . . she's busy powdering her nose, I believe."

"What the devil for? These women and their blasted powder, eh?"

"Well, you see, the powder got rubbed off."

"Ah? You been up to your larks again?"

"No, no. Nothing of the sort. No, you misunderstand me. You see, she fell out of the trap!"

"What!"

"It turned over. Spilt her all over the road. I happened to be there."

"Where's the horse?"

"We sent a man down. It wasn't hurt. The trap isn't a lot of use, by the way. You'll have to buy a new one."

"These women! Always dashing about. Can't stop 'em. Won't have a groom. Driving about. It's not decent. I suppose she's broken her leg or some fool thing or other?"

"No, at least, I don't think so. She seemed fairly fit. We came back in the car. Olivia was there. But she didn't want any sympathy."

"She wouldn't. No use for sympathy. None of 'em. Hard as nails, my boy. Well, well. They'll

go their own way. God knows what sort of mothers they'll make!"

"Er . . . yes . . . no . . . I think she's all right anyway."

"Was she unconscious?"

"A little. But it was only shock. Yes. Only shock, that's all. Only shock."

Poor Jeremy felt paralyzed. He could think of nothing to say. The Earl's machine gun method of conversation seemed to drive all power of consecutive thought out of his head. Besides, why in the name of all that was wonderful hadn't he asked Olivia about Lady Dorothy's father? He knew nothing whatever about him, and conversation was a fearful and dangerous torture. He found himself repeating "only shock. That's all. Only shock," until he saw the Earl looking at him in alarm.

"You're a bit rattled yourself, eh? Better come and have a refresher. You need it. You're all to pieces, man. So she's powdering her nose? She's a good girl, eh? Well plucked. But too fine, Arthurton. Shouldn't breed 'em so fine. Doesn't do. And that reminds me. Look here. When are you going to settle down? Not getting any younger. Time you thought about things, eh? And your father going off like that. Pop! I didn't come to the funeral. Can't bear 'em. Have to go to my own. That's enough. I'll come to your wedding, though. When's it going to be?"

"It hardly depends on me, does it?" stammered Jeremy. "I . . . er . . . don't want to rush in like a bull at a gate."

"Bull be dashed. They like it."

"Not bulls? Surely not bulls?"

"Now then, young man, don't you pull my leg. You know what I mean. Go in and win. Go to her. Say, 'look here, Dorothy, I've had enough of all this damn nonsense; I'm through with pictures and poets and highfaluting. When are we going to be married? I've got the estate to think of, and there's your father simply crying out for a nursery full of grandchildren.' Yes, you can tell her that. Tell her I like babies. Lots of 'em. It's only right!"

"I can't help feeling," said Jeremy, who was beginning to find his feet again, "that it might put her off."

"Put her off! What next? What's she going to marry you for anyway? Look here, Arthurton, you're the heir to Pulldan now. That conger eel of a brother of yours'll never set you up as he ought to. You're worth twenty of him. Always were. The day you marry Dorothy, this place is yours. Now don't argue. I've got no boys. She's all I've got. I'm turning the place over to her entirely. And there's a matter of ten thousand a year. I've got enough to live on. I don't want much. I'd live down at the other place—you know, Tray House. A butler and a couple of men, and a chauffeur and my chef—I don't want a lot of servants messing about. I can manage on five thousand comfortably. Free of tax, that is. Damn the taxes. You'd be far more comfortable than waiting for that conger eel Philip to look after you."

"You're too good," murmured Jeremy, at his

wit's end, and yet savoring the humor of the situation.

"Too good fiddlesticks. I want to see her happy with some babies. Steady her. She might have a boy. Think of that! Doesn't it make you feel good to be alive? Eh? You lucky boy!"

"Yes, oh, yes. But you know . . ."

"Don't but . . . I can't stand buts. I suppose you're waiting for her. Well, tell her what I said. I daren't tell her"—this in a quieter, more confidential tone—"She'd make me sit up. But then I'm only her father. Don't count nowadays. But you tell her. I'll leave you to it. See you at lunch time. Tip me the wink if it's all serene. It only wants nerve."

"Phew!"

Jeremy, alone again, breathed once more.

"He's right. It only wants nerve," he thought. "How I wish I had his! This gets worse and worse. If he goes on at that rate he'll start engaging nurses! He does run on! But he's a good sort. What was it he called Philip—conger eel?—pretty good that . . . Oh, what the dickens am I going to do?"

In search of inspiration he wandered into the room which opened out onto the loggia. It was a curious place, Lady Dorothy's own favorite experimental room. The walls were silver, the ceiling blue, and the carpet black. All the furniture—and there was but little—was painted a warm gray with the edges picked out in orange. There was but one picture on an easel in the corner. It was an incomprehensible series of angles, curves, shafts of light

and splashes of color. It was called "Meditation."

Miserably he turned away. He'd have to understand that too. On the painted table were three books bound in vellum. They were very thin volumes. He opened one at random. It was entitled "Hoops," and the author was a person claiming the name of Jean Tomp.

"This is one of 'em," he muttered, turning the leaves. He stopped at a poem headed "Rain."

> "Forlornly
> Black hurting drops on the hurt grass
> Palely suffering.
> Life and curves of deepest blue
> The slavers of the rain
> And a pale world of wet."

He closed the book deliberately.

"That settles it," he said. "If that's the sort of stuff I've got to talk about, I'm through. I can stand a good deal. I could stand it all. Even her father. But not that. Not Jean Tomp. Not on your life, my boy. When I'm through with this job I shall want my brain safe and sound. I don't want to go playing tricks with it."

"Ah. There you are!"

The voice of Lady Dorothy came to him from the sunshine outside. He turned and saw her in the pale magnificence of her well-schemed beauty. She moved towards him, and as she did so he dropped the vellum-bound book onto the table as though it had been hot. Jolly awkward to be caught with that just now. Perhaps she hadn't noticed?

"What do you think of Tomp's things?" said Lady Dorothy.

"Bilge!" said Jeremy, unable to trifle with his conscience any longer.

"Splendid!" said Lady Dorothy, to his amazement. "So do I! I don't think it means anything at all. Violet sent them to me for my opinion. I'm so glad you agree."

"There you go," thought Jeremy bitterly. "That's the sort of luck I have. She agrees with me!"

"Well, why do you read such stuff?" he queried, anxious to gain time.

"One must *know,*" said Lady Dorothy earnestly. "Surely you realize that. I know you did not approve of Marcel Proust, but you read him. After all, only ignorance is impossible."

"The perfect highbrow. My hat!" said Jeremy to himself. "I've a jolly good mind to read some of this stuff, go Bolshie about it, and smash all the mental furniture that way. I wonder who this chap Proust is?" Aloud he said, rashly,

"It's all very well to rave about things just because their date happens to be early twentieth century. But I'm not so sure. My taste is going backwards, I think."

"But how far back?"

That was a poser. He knew so little about either backward or forward. There was something so irresistibly comic about the two of them discussing literature in that farcical room, each completely in the dark as to the other's real tastes or character. It was the more comic when the real drama of the

situation was remembered. Lady Dorothy was waiting for him to declare himself, to make some demonstration of affection. She had been away, she had expected a warm welcome. Olivia, bless her heart for her old-fashioned kindness, had gone away and left them together. She wanted him to show her that he still cared.

Jeremy, on the other hand, was seeking wildly for some sort of lead which would bring his courage to the sticking point and enable him to break off the other man's engagement. Olivia—the cool cheek of the girl—had gone off and left him to face the music.

"How far back? Well, what about Milton?" he said at last, Milton being the only poet's name he could remember offhand.

"Arthur!" she exclaimed. "And then you say you're not modern. Why, it's the very latest fad to go back to Milton in poetry, to Bach and Handel and Purcell in music. Why, you're positively highbrow!"

"It's awfully hot in here, isn't it?" said Jeremy. "Let's get into the air."

He felt perhaps he could say what he had to say more easily out in the open, when he was not bothered by those silver walls and that monstrous painting.

"Do you like my room? I had it done while I was away."

"Sorry," said Jeremy truthfully. "I don't."

"Now, why? Father sees red if he comes in here!"

"It's . . . I don't know . . . it's restless. You see, I like a room to be friendly. Some rooms feel

kind immediately you enter them. Perhaps it's the silver walls. . . . I don't know."

"I can rig up a quarrel on this if I'm careful," he thought, snatching at straws.

"Perhaps you're right," she said. "I wasn't satisfied myself. But there is a need sometimes for something more than mere restfulness. Don't you feel it?"

She took his arm as she spoke, and they moved across towards the sunken water-garden.

"Personally, I've had enough restlessness," said Jeremy grimly. "I could do with a little peace and quietness now and again. The ideal world as I see it is where everything is what it seems, and there are no fakes."

"What do you mean? What have fakes to do with it? I don't understand."

"Well, you see . . . er . . . I mean . . ." stammered Jeremy, conscious of having made a slip. "I mean fakes. I like real things. You know, muffins, and good solid restful things like that. I hate imitation anything, imitation poetry, imitation opinions, imitation men and women, imitation art. I suppose the only bird that won't go to Heaven is the cuckoo. Just because he isn't what he seems."

"Honesty being the best policy?" she smiled.

"Well, isn't it?"

"I wonder. Is it for women?"

Jeremy pondered this for a while. There seemed to be a catch in it. If he agreed, she might take him at his word, and from what he could see she was modern enough to tell him straight out she was in love with him. If he said no, he would look a silly

ass. He felt like a man lost on a common at midnight in the middle of a bramble thicket. Whatever he did was wrong, and any moment he might come a cropper.

"I don't know," he said absently, and let his thoughts wander back to Africa where the only dangers had been lions and snakes, and malaria, and natives and crocodiles.

And lunch was coming, lunch between the three of them. A grand guignol affair, an unimaginable atrocity, a continual walking of the plank.

"I've just been talking to your father."

"Was he anxious about me? He's rather a dear. But he dates, you know. Badly. He is so—what shall I say—so drastic?"

"Yes, he's all that. And then some more."

"What's he been saying?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing much."

All the time he was saying to himself, "When we get to the water-lily pool, I'll do it. Pull myself together and go in off the deep end. Ugh! I wish it was to-morrow night, or next year, or anything but now. The water-lily pool . . . not a foot farther . . . I'll do it."

"Doesn't it?" he heard her saying, and realized with a shock he hadn't been listening to a word she had said.

"Doesn't it what?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter. I suppose we were both talking nonsense. Come, I want you to see my roses."

She sheered deliberately away from the water-lily

pool, and bore off to the left where a mass of climbing roses swept in waves of color over a stone arch leading into the walled garden at the side of the Hall.

"All right," thought Jeremy, "never mind the water-lily pool. When we get to the arch. Not a step farther. I've got to do it. Heaven help me!"

But he did not do it. For quite casually, and utterly ignorant of the effect she might produce, she sprang a mine under his feet, the shock of which left him speechless.

"I forgot to tell Olivia. I knew there was something I had to tell her. And now perhaps she'll settle down and get married like a reasonable person."

"Get married? Eh? What? I say . . ."

"What's the matter with you? You knew that it was practically a settled affair before Alec Shane went to America. She was practically engaged to him. It was an open secret anyway. I thought you knew. However, Alec Shane has come back. I met him in London last week. And he's coming up here to-day. I don't know, but I believe he's going to speak to Olivia right away!"

"Get married? Olivia? Married? . . ."

He ran his fingers through his hair, stopped dead and faced her.

"But . . . it's . . . no. You must have made a mistake. It's silly."

"What is the matter with you? Aren't you well?"

"But . . . Olivia . . ."

"There's nothing very remarkable in that! She's of age. People do get married, you know. There's

nothing to stop her. Shane's a decent sort, too. A bit of a Philistine perhaps. But he's Olivia's sort. And he knows what he wants. Arthur! Are you ill?"

For Jeremy, staggered by this latest revelation, and possessed of but one single idea—that of quitting the Hall by hook or by crook at the earliest possible moment—had suddenly sat down with his hand to his brow.

"I do feel just a bit uncertain," he said. "Er . . . I'll be all right. . . . It's that confounded horse, I expect."

"You poor dear. You risked yourself to get me out of a silly mess, and I never thought to ask how you were. Sit quite still. I'll run up to the house and get you something. Now don't move!"

She was gone before he could protest and soon came running back with a glass of brandy. Her father came behind her.

"What's all this? I told you you were not yourself, my boy."

"I'd better get back, I think," said Jeremy. "Could I borrow the car? I'll be all right. Just a bit of a shock, you know. That's all. Just a shock."

Lady Dorothy ran off again to order the car.

"You'd better look after yourself, young man," said her father, when they were alone. "If you're going to live up to Dorothy, you'll need all your wits about you. Got any pain?"

"No, no pain. Only shock. Just shock. That's all. Just a shock!"

"Don't start that again! Here, there's the car. Give me your arm. Off you go. And get to bed

when you get back. Sure you wouldn't sooner stay here?"

"Oh, quite sure. I'll be all right. Just a shock—"

"Stop it! Right you are, Jenkins. Pulldan. And drive carefully, see?"

The wheeze had worked like a charm.

CHAPTER VI

"THAT'S a rum go!" said the Earl of Tray as he watched the car sweep round the drive towards the gate. "Rum. Deuced rum. What the devil . . ."

"Now, father!" said his daughter coolly. "Don't fuss. It's not rum, really. He got me out of a perfectly dreadful mess. We must have piled up against that dead wall at the bottom of the hill if he hadn't jumped and hung on. It's only natural he should be shaken up."

"Looks a bit queer. Sending him off like that. All by himself. Ought to have gone with him."

"Nonsense. He doesn't want any one fussing over him."

"You were pretty pleased to have him fussing over you when you came out of that trap. I'll bet you were. What d'you mean, dashing about all on your own like that? I suppose you were driving Bess? You know she's vicious."

"She's not vicious with me. Besides, it's foolish to let a horse get the upper hand just because it's got a name for being vicious."

"You're too hard, my dear. Too hard. On everything. You ride at everything. Bless my soul, what do you think God Almighty made gates for if it wasn't for women? No good a woman being hard. It only breaks her."

"What have you been saying to Arthurton?"

"Oh, nothing!" he answered hurriedly. "Nothing much. Just discussing things."

"What things?"

"Oh, things. Just things. There's the lunch bell. Come along, my dear."

"But what things? I want to know. Arthur dodged the question when I asked him. You've been talking about me?"

The Earl of Tray was far from happy. He was more than a little terrified by his daughter. She was so ruthless, so direct, so masterful, and so confoundedly knowing. Besides, he was very fond of her. With other men, he could hold his own, lay down the law, get a reputation for real outspoken frankness. With Dorothy, he seemed to lose all the firm consistency of his mind. She was so like her mother. The late Countess of Tray had been a wonderful wife to him. She had forced him to take his place in the Lords, written his speeches for him, shoved him into the forefront of the suffragist agitation, so as to give her party the added brilliance of a titled masculine supporter. She had dominated him completely, taken him round to afternoon meetings in Mayfair drawing-rooms, and dragged him to serve on committees. Fortunately the war came before she had persuaded him to chain himself to anybody's railings by way of protest. The Countess had been a brilliant woman, unsparing in her devotion to her ideal.

She had given him one child, his daughter. Then during the war she had died suddenly and left him lonely. For he had loved her. He had loved even her domination of him, but he had never really for-

given her refusal to have any more children. He wanted a boy. He needed a boy, for the estate, for the title, for his own natural satisfaction. His affection had turned to his only daughter. She, even as a child, had profited by her mother's arts and had mastered him. She could twist him round her little finger, and did so frequently. He loved her, and because he loved her, he was afraid of her, under her thumb, and in spite of his bluster her abject slave.

"We did mention you, my dear!" he temporized, as they went into lunch. "I forget."

"What did you say?"

"Oh, nothing important. Just the usual."

"What was the usual?" she went on relentlessly, not at all put off by his jaunty air.

"Oh, no importance, my dear. How fine the roses are this year, eh?"

"Never mind the roses. What did you say to Arthur?"

"Well . . . I may have asked him . . . when he was going to settle down . . ."

"Yes?" She stopped on the terrace, faced him, a storm gathering, a storm of anger and irritation.

"Yes?" she repeated.

"Oh, nothing, my dear . . . I assure you . . ."

"Don't lie, Daddy! You're the poorest hand at it in the County. Out with it!"

"I may have mentioned . . . marriage . . ."

"Yes? . . . Go on . . . I'm going to know!"

Driven by her insistence, and moved by the reality of his own emotion, for he really wanted to see her

married and settled down with babies of her own, he came out with it at last.

"Told him what I thought about him, if you must know. Told him it was time he made up his mind. And I might as well tell you too, my dear. I'm very fond of you, you know. You're like your mother.

"But I'm a lonely man. I'd like to be seeing some youngsters about the place. God knows there's room for 'em here. I don't believe in all this dashing about, rushing here and running there. Get down to the facts, eh? You're a fine, healthy young woman. You've had the best this world can give you. I'm sick of seeing you running after a lot of decrepit poets and bawdy artists. I'd like to see you settled down. Babies. That's what you want. That's what I want! Now, I've said it!"

She looked at him calmly, clearly. His outburst, the most remarkable from him she had ever heard, had surprised her. But she dared not let herself be moved by it.

"You're a dear, Daddy," she said. "But you'd better keep out of this. You'll burn your fingers. I don't know what Arthur said to you. He must have been surprised. But listen to me. This is my business. Not yours. You've nothing to do with it. You talk about marriage and babies and settling down as though there was only my wish to consider. Well, you're wrong. I'm not so sure that I will marry Arthur. I'm not so sure that he's going to ask me!"

"But . . ."

"It's no use. And I won't argue any more."

A butler appeared at the door.

"Luncheon is served, my lord!"

Lady Dorothy passed in.

The Earl of Tray remained for a moment on the terrace. He walked solemnly over to a garden seat, and seized with a sudden need for action, kicked it violently so that it crashed into a corner.

Then he too went in.

The butler stepped discreetly out upon the terrace, restored the chair to its proper position and followed his master.

No one knows what he thought.

CHAPTER VII

JEREMY LAYTREE, alias the Honorable Arthur Arthurton and heir to the title and estates of the Amlett family, sat in the seclusion of the blue room miserably reviewing his position. On the table at his elbow lay an open book of poetry. Forced to carry on the farce, and hide his real identity from Lady Dorothy, he had managed to scrape a nodding acquaintance with half-a-dozen or so of the most important of Arthur's favorite poets. He liked Masefield. Especially he loved that perfect lyric:

"I must go down to the sea again."

That awakened a quick sympathy in him. He would have liked to go down to the sea again, and take the first boat for anywhere. Before him on the table lay the draft of an advertisement he had sketched out for the agony column in the *Times:*

"Jeremy Laytree. For the love of Mike come back. Bargain off. Situation hopeless."

That might catch his eye. Every day the situation grew worse. Old Milton, the station-master, had begun to look at him sideways; there was Lady Dorothy and this confounded poetry nonsense, and now to cap it all this business of Alec Shane who was expected at the Castle any moment.

He groaned, and turned to his poetry books. He turned a few pages of a violet-backed volume, and came upon:

"He is debonair beneath the spreading Gumtree.
But what is that thither-whither light in his eyes?
That is Trotter of the tribulations
That is the man who is not as other men.
For he has been across those seas and seen the blue country."

"You can search me," he said aloud, "but that's not poetry. It isn't anything. And I haven't broken off that beastly engagement."

A few pages on he came across another passage:

"He is gone. They are all gone. Gone. Gone!
It is nothing. I'm taken this way sometimes."

"That's the first sensible thing the blighter has said. Suppose she wants me to discuss that? I'll discuss it! I'll discuss it so that there'll be nothing left of it. It's more like a literary and debating society than a love affair! Pah!"

He closed the book and lit a pipe. From his window he could see out across the gardens to the river. Everything looked perfect: the early sunshine of a flawless day lay over the lawns, and farther off deep blue shadows lined the distant woods. He thought of Olivia, thought hopelessly of her. After all, she was not for him. She was born and bred to all this. She was part and parcel of it. There was something of her in the quiet peace and settled serenity of the place, in its clean fresh beauty, in its finished perfection.

Not that he was an outcast, or a social impossible. His family was as old as hers perhaps, but the Laytrees had never been content to stay in one place. They were wanderers over the face of the earth, adventurers, sea men, explorers, colonizers; they were rolling stones, and they had gone on rolling until not only was there no moss, but hardly any stone.

"I'm the last Laytree," thought Jeremy, "and I'm out of place here. I took this job on for a lark. It's not a lark, not by a long way. I wish I were out of it. Save for Olivia . . . Um . . . yes . . . I know she kissed me. Or she let me kiss her. I hardly know which now. I've had that anyway. But I can't hold her to it. I can't hold anybody to anything. I'm an anachronism, a fake, a sham antique, and I wish I was anywhere but here."

But even as he faced the idea of immediate withdrawal, he knew it would be hard.

"I'll go back where I came from," he thought. "There's this fellow Shane, too. I wonder what about that. Perhaps he's a decent fellow. I'd better see Olivia about that too."

For in spite of his having rushed away from Lady Dorothy the previous day, he had not had an opportunity to discuss matters with Olivia. In fact she had almost avoided him. He went in search of her and found her in the library arranging a bowl of roses. He stopped by the curtained doorway to admire her. Whatever she thought of that kiss in the wood, there was no doubt about his own feelings. He loved her. Quite simply, loyally, finally and completely, he loved her. It is rare in life to come

up against some emotion, some enthusiasm, some belief, which is at once recognized as true once and for all, complete in all its details, which will hold fast for all time. It had happened to Jeremy. As he watched her dark, shapely head bent over the roses he was conscious of an overpowering rush of emotion. There before him was the one girl in all the world; he had met her, and whatever might happen in the future, nothing could change the fact that he loved her. This was one of those emotions which are instantly true and for all time.

She turned and saw him.

"Sluggard!"

"I haven't slugged a bit! I've been up in my room trying vainly to read some of that ghastly poetry."

"Ah? Then you've decided not to jib?"

There was, he thought, a faint note of disappointment in her voice.

"Not it! But the jibbing is postponed unavoidably."

"Why?"

"It wasn't the moment. There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken by the scruff of the neck— You know how it goes. Well, yesterday wasn't the tide. I missed the boat. You haven't got a book on etiquette handy, I suppose? I'd like to read up something about breaking engagements."

"Is that what you came in here for?"

"No. To be quite frank, I came in here to see whether I could find you."

"Ah?" She was smiling again, but with a grave, preoccupied air.

"Yes. I wanted to talk to you."

"Seriously?"

"I don't know. Look here, do you know a chap called Alec Shane?"

"Yes; I do," she answered in a low voice. "He wants to marry me!"

"So I gathered," said Jeremy.

"From whom?"

"From Lady Dorothy."

"Why from her?"

"She happened to tell me."

"Why?"

"Well, I was just summoning up my courage to break off my engagement, and wishing I was dead, when she came plump out with the information that Alec Shane was expected here any moment, and was in fact on his way. I lost my head and left her. She'll be furious. I can't help that. I wanted to see you. Then I couldn't find you. Where were you?"

"I didn't want to see you. That was all," said Olivia. "Oh, can't you see that my position is not too easy?"

"Mine's not exactly a bed of roses," said Jeremy.

"I'm sorry," said Olivia, coming closer to him. "I would have told you before. But, you see, I didn't think he was coming back so soon, and we're not engaged; and besides, it wasn't exactly your affair *then,* was it?"

"What do you mean, *'then'?"*

"What I say," said Olivia, looking down. "Then isn't now, is it? Or is it?"

"You mean yesterday morning—in the wood?"

"Yes," said Olivia, looking away. "If . . . if

that meant anything to you . . . I mean . . . well, I suppose it is your business now, or it will be?" She raised her eyes to his, and for a moment he was tempted to take her in his arms. But, no, he would take no unfair advantage of his position.

"I can put him off for a while," went on Olivia quickly. "But if I say no straight out, and you break your engagement with Lady Dorothy, people might begin to ask questions."

"It's nobody's business but ours."

"Um! But you see, Jeremy, you're in rather a strange position."

"Yes. I see that!"

"I don't think you see how strange even yet. It's quite true it's nobody's business but ours. But it's got to remain ours. You see, you—the real you—is a secret, as it were, shared between Philip and me."

"Philip," said Jeremy deliberately, "is a conger eel. I have it on the authority of the Earl of Tray."

"He is apt sometimes. But you must see that you can't give the family secret away?"

"Ah! I'm the skeleton in the cupboard? That's it. Well, I can bear it. I won't give it away; wild horses will not drag it from me. I will go to the stake and all that sort of thing."

"Yes. But you won't go to the altar, will you?" She was laughing at him again. He looked so delightfully rumpled when he was bewildered.

"There's another thing. About Shane. You'd better know this. It may be jolly awkward."

"Go on. Pile it on. I can bear anything to-day."

"You and he were supposed to be in the same

regiment together in Palestine. The—Dragoons."

"Cavalry or camels?"

"Cavalry. Dismounted, I believe."

"I think I had better be going. If I'm going to be a successful skeleton in the cupboard, I've either got to live in the cupboard, or make tracks *tout de suite*. It's all up. I can't live in a cupboard. It doesn't appeal to me, really. And I should pine away for lack of exercise. Food would be difficult too."

"I could come and whisper sweet nothings to you through the keyhole."

"Without being ungallant, may I ask whether you have ever tried to maintain existence on sweet nothings whispered through a keyhole? I'm sure I should lack vitamins or something."

"But why does the simple fact that you and Shane were in the same regiment make it so impossible?"

"My dear, there is no gulf known to man so profound as that fixed for all eternity between cavalry and infantry. I was a foot slogger myself. They don't mix. He'll have me shot at dawn. Besides—oh, it's impossible . . . have you ever been in an officers' mess?"

"Once or twice to tea. They seemed to be reasonably normal beings?"

"That was the softening influence of the fair sex. They're very susceptible. But when they're really in mess they're the queerest beings you'll find in modern civilization. Officers' messes are the last haunt of Black Magic, superstition and belief in witchcraft. Why, I was in an officers' mess once,

where it was a stern and unbreakable custom to give the piano three whiskeys and sodas every guest night."

"How on earth . . . ?"

"They poured 'em in at the top. It's a fact."

"I'll see that Shane doesn't have a guest night while he's here. I shouldn't care for my Bechstein to develop a taste for that sort of thing."

"Oh, that won't be Shane's pet futility. No two messes have the same customs. And once thoroughly broken in to them, no man who has ever belonged to a given mess ever forgets them when he's eating with a brother officer. He may eat his pudding with a spoon, or eat cheese with apple tart. They have strange fads religiously cultivated, queer little kinks of procedure. They do things with the port wine."

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, pass it round clockwise, or with the left hand, or with the stopper in, or with it out, or—I don't know. There's a sort of Black Magic about it, especially about the port. I'm wise to the Black Magic of my own mess. But he'll smell me out like a native witch finder when I don't know his particular brand of Mumbo Jumbo."

"Men are funny!"

"They are. They're the funniest things made so far. I wish they weren't quite so funny."

"I shouldn't worry about it if I were you. You'll get through. Watch what he does. If he eats his potatoes with his fingers you do the same."

"Oh, they never go so far as that. They're always perfect little gentlemen."

"Even on guest nights?"

"I ought not to have told you that."

"Never mind. I'll forget it."

"Thanks. Now let's see what the position really is. Item one: I have never been in Palestine. Item: I don't know anything about the jolly old Dragoons he belongs to. Item: If he talks about the war all my lies will be African ones, and I'll put my foot in it. This is worse than ever."

"If I remember rightly," said Olivia, "there's a very fine regimental history on the second shelf over there."

Jeremy contemplated the three fat volumes.

"No," he said. "I can't bear it. I'm no bookworm. I've already read far too much to-day. Besides, he'd catch me out. It's no good. I must just rely on my native capacity for tact, and lie like a genius when it comes to the difficult parts. If I can get the game past Lady Dorothy, I can get it past Alec Shane. Cheer up, Olivia. We'll win through yet!"

He met Shane at lunch. Lord Amlett had not yet returned, and Jeremy, as the heir, took the high carved chair with his back to the great window. Shane was on his right, Olivia on his left.

"You're lookin' pretty fit and bobbish," said Shane.

"So, so," said Jeremy.

"But you're lookin' just a shade fatter. Better diet, you know."

"I'm all right," said Jeremy uneasily, wishing he would not be so personal.

"I met old Gaiters in the club yesterday," went

on Shane. "Asked after you. He's getting a bit long in the tooth."

"They ought to give him a staff job," said Jeremy. "His teeth are long enough, I suppose?" It was a bold stroke, but it happened to be right. "Gaiters" was the regimental nickname for the commandant, and it would have been fatal not to know anything about him. In fact, the increasing net of difficulties about his feet was becoming so painful that Jeremy was growing reckless. He could see there would be a violent explosion before long, and he felt that he might as well give a brilliant performance before he was snuffed out altogether. Moreover, the way Shane looked at Olivia annoyed him. Shane had a hard mouth, so hard that it clipped the endings from his words and the unnecessary words from his sentences before they could escape. His eyes were hard and straight, the eyes of an open-air man, hard living, hard-riding, Spartan and hostile.

"He's the sort of man who makes saints," thought Jeremy, "by making martyrs of them first."

"You staying in England long?" asked Jeremy.

"That depends," said Shane deliberately, looking at Olivia.

"That's right," said Jeremy. "Be tactful, do!"

Shane colored slightly and crumbled bread.

"Don't get quarreling, you two children," said Olivia. "If you'll excuse me, I'll go and order the car for Philip. He comes back this afternoon. We had a wire this morning."

As Jeremy held the door open for her to pass, she whispered, "Go slow."

It was difficult. Jeremy had been going slow all

through lunch. He did not like this man. He hated to have to eat a meal with him, for in the elaborate ceremonial of eating he was afraid of giving himself away. There had been several references to the regiment, all of which Jeremy had parried, or Olivia had warded off. Now he was left alone with the man.

"She's right. We mustn't quarrel. Never know. Look here, old chap, have I any sort of chance?"

"Do you want my advice?" asked Jeremy, "or do you merely want me to tell you that what you think is right? I can do both."

"Want your advice, of course," said Shane. "I'm not a child."

"Well, keep your wool on. But you won't be particularly joyful about it when you get it. My advice is very simple: Clear out."

"Thanks," said Shane.

There was a long silence, and then he added:

"You don't know what you're talkin' about."

"I knew you didn't want advice," said Jeremy. "You wanted soft soap. Well, I don't deal in it."

"Why should I clear out?"

"Don't be chuckle-headed. Any one could see with half an eye that Olivia is not thinking about getting fixed up. Besides, if you break the subject now, so near to her father's death, you'll upset her."

Shane watched him curiously. He had caught the words "her father's death," which seemed to come strangely from Arthur. Funny he didn't say just "father." Queer chap, anyway, Arthurton. Seemed to have changed a bit too. Different manners.

Through the windows from across the lawns came

the sound of a mowing-machine, a soft, drowsy, summery sound, full of the busy peace of the countryside.

"How jolly it could be here," thought Jeremy, "if this silly chump would only go away, and there were no Lady Dorothy, and I were really what I am supposed to be."

Inside the room, there was no sound save the murmur of their voices. They were alone there, and Jeremy could feel that on this interview between them, the whole of the future depended. This man could make it very awkward for him, impossible in fact. If he once suspected the real relations between Olivia and Jeremy, he would take a rare pleasure in upsetting the applecart. Jeremy's impersonation would be a double affront to him. It would offend his sense of what was right and fitting, outrage his regimental and caste pride, and, more important still, would reveal the fact that he had a rival in his love for Olivia. He could not have come at a worse time.

"I'm not goin' to go like a bull at a gate exactly," said Shane. "There are ways and means. I think she was glad to see me?"

"Maybe," said Jeremy. "Have a glass of port?"

He pushed the decanter over with his right hand, so full of his own thoughts that he did not realize what he was doing, did not realize what he had done. He should have passed the port with his left hand to be true to the immutable traditions of the regiment. A slight thing, but no regimental mess worth its salt ever takes port casually. It is a serious business, and any deviation from the established tradition is

severely discountenanced, as Jeremy well knew. But he was past caring now, and he had ceased to try to live up to Shane's particular regimental gods. It was impossible anyway. And perhaps Shane would merely think he was growing slack. Wasn't worth worrying about. Be blowed to him. Shane, of course, noticed it. It fitted in with a score of tiny details he had noticed in his supposed old mess mate.

They were all tiny things. He was not wearing regimental cuff-links for one; he had refused sherry before lunch for another. Most important of all, he had omitted the toast of the regiment at the end of lunch. Whenever two or more of the Dragoons were met together, it was an unwritten law that the toast of the regiment should be drunk, in silence and standing at the end of a meal. All these things puzzled Shane. The Arthur Arthurton he had known had been a stickler for such points, even to excess. He seemed to have changed. There was something queer about him. As yet, Shane had no inkling of the truth which was far too unlikely, too fantastic, to be considered. He was just puzzled, and a little irritated. He had liked Arthur Arthurton as he had known him; he was not so sure now. Perhaps being heir to the title had upset him? Men were curious about such things.

Jeremy had risen.

"Shall we move on? You'd like to see the horses perhaps."

"Yes," said Shane absent-mindedly. "But look here, about Olivia . . ."

"What about her?"

"I can't go on like this. I've got to know just

where I stand. Will you speak to her for me? Tell her that I don't want to bother her, but that you have an idea that I'd like to know whether she has changed her mind . . . or not."

"Better take my advice and leave it alone," said Jeremy.

"Damn it, you might be a sport! I'd like to know where I stand."

"Do you suppose," broke out Jeremy angrily, "that you're the only one who'd like to know just where he stands? D'you suppose nobody else has any difficulties? Why, my dear fathead, I know one or two people not a hundred miles away whose troubles would make yours look like a farthing candle in a film studio. You're just being darned selfish. I can't see my way clear to blurt out anything to Olivia. She'd probably box my ears, and tell me to mind my own business. And quite right too."

Shane stopped dead in his tracks. The lines about his mouth hardened.

"Better have this out," he said brusquely.

"Have it out certainly," said Jeremy. "But there's no need to break the furniture about it."

"Are you definitely against me in this then?"

"Yes," said Jeremy. "Since you ask it, I am. I've given you my advice, and it was well meant. But since you ask me whether I am going to help you to marry Olivia, I may as well be frank and say 'No' straight out."

"And you won't give your reasons?"

"I've given all the reasons I've got to give. Hang it, man, I'm a human being, not a professor of logic. If you can't see the reasons sticking out all over the

situation like . . . like . . . knobs on a sergeant-major's bedstead, I can't help you. Use your native gumption."

"I can't see any reasons."

"Pity the poor blind," said Jeremy. "I give you up. Any one with half an eye could see this is not the time. Besides, it's got nothing to do with me."

"I wanted your help. I hoped you would be my best man. We used to be good friends once."

"But I'm still the same as I always was. This is what comes from giving advice when it's asked. If I'd said 'go in and win' and you'd gone in and lost, you'd have thought I was still friendly. Instead of being merely potty."

"You're different," said Shane. "I don't know what it is. But you've changed. I don't seem to be able to get near to you."

"Don't keep harping on that."

"You remember that night in Palestine," said Shane.

"Look out," thought Jeremy.

"When I first put the idea to you, you weren't hostile to it then. Remember what you said?"

"No; I don't."

"You said: 'Go in and win' then, if I remember rightly," said Shane. "Frankly, I don't understand you. You pick a quarrel with me, and then calmly announce you've changed your mind. What am I to make of it?"

"Make what you like of it," said Jeremy, who was thoroughly unhappy. "I'm not the final court anyway. Ask Philip. After all, he's the eldest son. It's nothing to do with me."

Shane was pale, very quiet and perfectly self-possessed.

"Then I can count on your unfriendliness?" he said coldly.

"Don't be a blithering idiot!" said Jeremy. "You can't count on anything. If your own good sense doesn't tell you there are reasons why you should make yourself scarce, then no words of mine can do any good. You used not to be a tactless galoot. For heaven's sake don't behave like one now."

He turned away and left Shane standing there. His patience was strained to the utmost, and he could feel that in another minute he would blurt out something fatally indiscreet. "I'm about the world's worst impersonator," he said to himself. "Oh, be hanged to it! I'm going to find Olivia. Anything for a little peace and quiet. Let the blighter do his worst."

The blighter seemed in no hurry to act upon the powerful hints conveyed by Jeremy. He wandered across the lawns towards the boat house, and for some time paced up and down the banks of the stream. He was half making up his mind to get a boat out and row upstream for the sake of the exercise, when he became conscious of Lady Dorothy who was approaching across the grass.

"Where is everybody, Shane?" she asked.

"Dunno. Arthur's just left me in a first-class rotten temper, and Olivia's not to be seen. I'm going to pull up the stream a bit."

"It looks very inviting," said Lady Dorothy. "Suppose you punt and take me?"

"Righto!"

He was not by any means averse to the company of Lady Dorothy. She at any rate favored his wooing of Olivia, and having failed to get at Arthur direct, he thought he might tackle Lady Dorothy as a side issue.

The punt swung lazily out into midstream, and then glided along beneath the overhanging willows. Shane looked at Lady Dorothy as she lay among the scarlet and gold cushions. She was all in brilliant white, without a speck of color anywhere. The set perfection of her face appealed to him.

"You are a magnificent animal, Shane," she said softly, watching his powerful, lithe movements with the punt pole.

"Meanin' I've no brains to speak of?" he said, smiling. "Granted."

"No. I mean you're mostly physical, that's all. Do you ever read *anything?*"

"Never," said Shane. "Look at the *Times* now and again. You mean books, I suppose?"

"Um. Poetry ought to appeal to you. It appeals to Olivia anyway."

"I want to ask you something," he interrupted. "I want you to put in a word with Arthur. I think he's gone mad."

"Ah?"

"When I mentioned Olivia, he saw red, and wouldn't listen. Told me to clear out."

"Perhaps the idea of your marrying her was a shock to him. You should be more tactful. You should have given him time."

"But there was no sense in his quarreling about it. After all, he knew all about it."

"Was he very much upset?"

"All to pieces if you ask me. Can't make the beggar out. Not like the Arthur I used to know."

"Oh? Could you explain a little more? My father said much the same to me. He met Arthur the other day—just after my accident—and he keeps on saying 'Well, that's a rum go.' But what the rum go is, I've no idea. Do tell me what you've noticed. I'm very much interested, you know—personally."

"Well, it's odd. It's little things mostly. But I find him different. We used to be pals, you know. After all, he saved my life once. I'd cricked my ankle, and there was a nasty business with three Arabs. He turned up with a lump of clay they thought was a bomb. They ran for their lives, and he brought me in. Jolly sporting of him. But he doesn't seem to care now."

Lady Dorothy filed the story for future use. It was new to her, and she could see it might be valuable. But she was not disposed to run in harness with Shane. What she knew, she was keeping to herself, except as it pleased her.

"You said just now he knew all about your wanting to marry Olivia," said Lady Dorothy at length, idly.

"Why, yes! Years ago in Palestine, he told me to go in and win. It was all cut and dried."

"Curiouser and curiouser!" thought Lady Dorothy. "When I broke it to him, he looked as though he'd trodden on a snake!"

Aloud, she merely remarked that perhaps Arthur had changed his mind. She did not wish to discuss

Olivia. She wanted to keep Shane on the discussion of the new Arthur. But at the same time, she was not giving anything away.

"Don't you think he's nicer than he used to be?"

"Hanged if I do. I can't make the fellow out. We used to be good pals. He's lost all interest in the regiment."

"That's not exactly a vital difference, you know."

"No, but . . . he speaks differently. And—d'you know, this is curious. We used to be good pals, you know."

"Yes; you've told me that."

"Well . . . I don't know how to put it . . . but when I talk to him I feel all stirred up inside. As though he made me furious. Not for any particular reason. But just because he's there. As though he and I could never get on. And we used to be . . . You know it's queer."

"It's queer. But strangely enough I don't feel like that about him at all. I like him better. I think he's one of the nicest men I've met now. Much nicer than he used to be. We don't quarrel—or rather we haven't quarreled yet. We were always quarreling before. But I can't quarrel with him now."

"I can. It's easy."

"You ought to make allowances. After all, he's had several troubles lately. And you haven't seen him for a long time. You can't expect things to last forever, you know."

If Lady Dorothy had cared to take Shane completely into her confidence, and piece out her partial knowledge with his, the two of them could have held

the whip hand over Jeremy. They could have forced his hand any way they liked. But Shane was not sure of Lady Dorothy, and she was not sure of herself. She knew only that since this new warm intimate feeling had come to her, she did not dare to do anything which might imperil her enjoyment of it. Completely selfish, she had set her heart on fulfilling the promise of the moment at any cost. Shane was merely an extraneous circumstance. She could not see how she could use him, and so she dismissed him from her mind.

Shane turned the punt before they reached the weir, and they slid softly back to the boathouse.

"That was delightful," said Lady Dorothy. "I always think water is so soothing. I feel much more composed now. I'm going up to the Castle. Are you coming?"

"Well, I'm doubtful," said Shane. "I think perhaps I'd better go up on the off chance of seeing Olivia. Dash it all, I'm going to risk it! I'll ask her pointblank. No use funkin' a hedge when it's there. I can't go on like this, anyhow."

They went across the lawns to the Castle. The windows of the library were open. "Let's go in this way," said Lady Dorothy.

The Castle seemed strangely deserted. Shane rang a bell, but no one answered. He rang again and at last a worried and harassed footman appeared.

"Tell Mr. Arthurton I'd like to speak to him, will you," said Lady Dorothy."

The man looked foolish, as though he didn't know what to say.

"What's the matter with you, man? Don't stand there."

"He's not at home. They've all gone down to the village."

"Well?"

"There's been an accident . . . I don't know . . ."

At that moment there was the sound of the grinding of motor wheels outside.

"Steady there. Be careful. Where's the doctor?" The confused sound as of several people speaking at once came to them as they stood listening.

"What is it?" said Lady Dorothy in a whisper.

They went forward and looked out upon the drive. A little group stood bareheaded round the car. Jeremy, his hair all rumpled in the faint wind, was standing bewildered and unhappy, talking to the doctor.

"It's all over," the doctor was saying. "He is dead!"

A whispered word from one of the servants, and Lady Dorothy knew the truth. Lord Amlett's car had skidded and overturned in a ditch. Lord Amlett himself had been killed. For the second time in that short period, the title had passed on.

Jeremy, bewildered and worried, beckoned to a servant and gave some brief order.

"Yes, your lordship!" said the man instantly.

And then Jeremy knew to the full the measure of responsibility which he had undertaken. He, Jeremy Laytree, was now Lord Amlett!

CHAPTER VIII

DIFFICULTIES began to crowd in upon Jeremy Laytree from the moment he tried to take the position of Lord Amlett. There were papers to sign, shoals of them, and he dodged signing them until they could be put off no longer. Then he threw discretion to the winds and signed hundreds.

"That's all right," said Olivia cheerfully. "When Arthur comes back, if he doesn't like your writing he can sign 'em all over again. Serves him right."

"You're not very helpful, really, you know," said Jeremy. "I suppose you know that in the strictly legal and asinine sense, all those signatures are forgeries."

"Nonsense," said Olivia. "You haven't done it for your own profit. You've made nothing out of it. It's not as though you were feathering your own nest."

"No," said Jeremy. "It isn't. I haven't really got a nest, you know."

Then there were bills. It was really colossal the heap of bills presented to him by Wilkins, Lord Amlett's agent. Jeremy had refused to look at them. They had piled up for weeks after the death of Philip in the motor accident, and something would really have to be done about it soon. Ordinary current expenditure was all seen to by the agent through

the general estate account, but these were special and urgent expenses.

"If I tell Wilkins to see to them, he'll begin to smell a rat. If I let 'em hang over too long, he'll think it queer. If I don't get some ready cash soon, I'll be in Queer Street. Look here, Olivia. I believe we're reaching the end of our tether. I'll tell you what. Let's run away! Just you and I together. Beat it now, and put a notice in the papers to say that Lord Amlett has gone abroad. Then . . . we could get married . . . just you and I."

"You're a dear," she answered, rumpling his hair. "But it won't do. You've got to see it through."

"Lady Dorothy, and Alec Shane, and all that? Tell me, what about Alec Shane?"

"Well, what about him?"

"Are you . . . fond of him?"

"Yes, a little. He's an old friend. But don't get ideas into your head. I'm not going to marry him. In fact I've told him so. So that's that."

"Exit Mr. Shane?"

"Not exactly. I'm not quite clear in my mind about him. He's queer. When I told him, he didn't seem surprised. He made vague hints. Has he given you any indication that he suspects anything?"

"Bags of them," said Jeremy. "He looks at me as though I owed him something. But I don't think he tumbles to anything really. He couldn't very well. Unless he's been reading *Alice in Wonderland*. It's not the sort of thing that would strike one naturally."

He thought about Shane again later as he wandered through the garden. The man seemed to be

hanging on for some reason. The quarrel between them had not been renewed outwardly, but the sense of hostility remained.

"Just one more of those hidden snags," thought Jeremy. "When you take over another man's personality, you don't think of these things. I'm not like Arthurton, really. We may look alike. But the other things matter so much more. Hello. Who's this? Oh, Lord!"

It was the Earl of Tray, comparatively respectable for once, though smoking a rakish-looking cherrywood pipe which bubbled.

"Hello. Bin looking for you everywhere!"

"That's very nice of you."

"Dorothy's somewhere about. I don't know where. She's too restless to keep in one spot. You've got a nice place here, you know, Arthur; haven't been over here for ages. Didn't know you'd made such a picture of it. What are you going to do with it?"

"Dashed if I know. It's all Wilkins' doing. He looks after the place. I've had no time to go into things yet."

"Um. Sorry to hear that. Of course, you've been busy. And you've not been over to the Hall?"

"No, really I hardly know what I'm doing these days. There's such a lot to be done, and the change over has been so sudden."

"Well, don't want to press you, my boy. But you know what I think. And listen—here—" He came nearer—"Don't say that I told you. But don't leave her too long. She's not happy about you. Fretting a bit. Worried. I ought not to say anything. I

know that. But don't forget. She's my only one. I'd give anything to see her happy. It's pretty well all I live for. And I know she's set her heart on you. Not that she tells me. Bless you, no! She never tells me anything. But I can see things. For God's sake, pull yourself together, Arthur. There, now. I've said too much. But . . . I won't say another word. I'm going up to say howdyedo to Olivia. You'll find Dorothy somewhere about."

He rambled off, leaving Jeremy more miserable than before. Some day this unhappy business of Lady Dorothy would have to be settled. The problem was one infinitely worse than that of Shane. The question of Shane was a purely selfish one, but in this matter of Lady Dorothy, he was afraid to move lest he should hurt either her or her father. All his wits were concentrated on avoiding the issue, and postponing any decision, hoping against hope that the real Lord Amlett would come back and release him from the necessity of the painful interview which he could feel in his bones was drawing nearer every day.

As he passed through the rose garden, he fancied he caught a glimmer of moving color down by the sundial. He slipped out of the garden into the apple orchard, but his maneuver did not help him. Lady Dorothy was waiting for him, a striking figure in pale yellow which could not be overlooked.

"Ah!" she said, "at last! I have been looking for you everywhere. Why have you not been to see me? I have expected you these last three days."

She led the way back to the rose garden; there they would be invisible from the Castle.

"I have been up to the eyes in work," said Jeremy. "I am sorry."

"Since you would not come to me, I am come to you," she said with a faint note of pathos. She glanced sideways as she spoke.

"I am not worth your trouble," said Jeremy lightly.

"Only I can judge of that."

"I don't know about that," he answered. He could feel tension in the air. This was no chance meeting. There was a look of decision about Lady Dorothy, and he set himself to beat it, to parry all her thrusts, to forestall her attacks, to avoid committing himself, and so to escape the evil time when he must voluntarily admit one other person into the secret he had already kept so badly.

"You see, worth is such a comparative term."

"It's not comparative when it's a personal matter," said Lady Dorothy. "I admit that everything is relative. But even so, I suppose I can be allowed to know the relative worth of my own feelings. Only I know from what they spring. Only I know where they lead. Do you know, since I have come back, I find you changed in some way?"

"I'm just the same silly ass I always was."

"You're wrong there," she said, sitting down on the stone steps beneath the dial. "Look!" She pointed to the words on the sundial.

> "Time flies and man with time,
> Man changes, but not time with man."

"All things change. You with them. You're different, in yourself I mean."

"How?" said Jeremy. This was safe enough anyway. He looked down at her as she sat there, her shining, pale yellow dress making a startling note of color on the old gray stone.

"You're more direct for one thing," said Lady Dorothy. "You don't bend to my opinions any more. I come up against hard, little decisive points. When you said 'Bilge' about that book, you know. And other times. I think . . ." She paused and plucked a stalk of lavender, crushing it in her palms so that the fresh, keen perfume drifted up. ". . . I think that I like you better. But I am disappointed. Because you have changed apart from me, I mean. We were very near in mind at one time, Arthur."

She looked up at him.

"Yes, I suppose we were," he answered miserably.

"I was afraid that when you quarreled with poor Philip, and went away, that you might grow away from all this. I was right. You have. You're not the same as you used to be."

"No. I suppose you're right," he admitted, not without a secret twinge of amusement.

"Neither am I," said Lady Dorothy. "I want to tell you something about myself. You know most of it; at least I thought you knew. But you seem to have forgotten?"

She looked up at him questioning.

"I've a rotten memory, you know," he said stupidly.

"You'll make me angry in a little while," she said in a cold, almost hostile, tone.

"Listen. I've never spoken to any man as I have spoken to you to-day. But that's not all. You shall

hear everything. You'd better know me as I am. You know what my life has been, what the life of any woman situated as I have been must be. I've been my own mistress since I was of age. Absolutely with no reservation whatever. I've got everything. I've always had everything. Materially, I mean. I lacked only brothers. But I've been restless. Uneasy. I've felt that dreadful uneasiness any woman must feel when she sees she's got everything, and knows she's got nothing. I've never known reality."

Her quick fingers twisted tiny crumbs of plaster from the chinks of the steps. She was making her confession of faith, sitting there before him, her great eyes veiled, save when she lifted them suddenly to him, and disturbed him profoundly because he knew the only answer he could give was in itself an affront.

"You laugh at me now for being ultra modern. You laugh at my books, my fashions, my whims, my rooms; I can't help being as I am. I'm what my century has made me. If you want me different, make me different! I'll go backward. I'll do anything you like. I'll let my hair grow. I'll go back to Milton; I'll be Victorian or anything you please. I don't care. Modernity is nothing to me. I'll always have my sense of humor. And if it helps me to get nearer to reality—then . . . Arthur! . . ." She put out a hand. "Help me up!"

Jeremy put out his hand, bewildered, baffled by the conflicting changes of front. He couldn't fathom this woman. She began on one line of attack, and

switched off onto another before he could breathe. She took his arm, and they walked about the garden a little.

"Well?" she said softly. "Do you think I am a fool?"

"You don't expect me to answer that, do you?" said Jeremy. "Whether I say no or yes, it will not sound polite."

"Ah! there you are. Every time I put a direct question you avoid it. It doesn't matter what it is."

"A moment ago," said Jeremy, "you were telling me that I had achieved a more surprising directness of speech than ever you had known! I can't be the brusque, outspoken man of few words and the elusive butterfly at one and the same time!"

"But you shall answer," she said.

Her voice was low and soft, her great eyes shining. For Lady Dorothy had come to Pulldan with one idea in her mind: to bring matters to a head. She was not unintelligent, and she had been using her wits for all they were worth in the last few weeks. She had noticed a hundred odd details that Jeremy had hoped unnoticed. She had seen his perplexity increase as the difficulties grew more insoluble. Now she intended to force the issue.

"Stop a moment," she said. They had reached the shade of a pergola of crimson ramblers at the far end of the garden. "Stop, I want to say something to you." She took her hand from his arm, came close to him. He could catch the faint fragrance of clove carnation as she bent towards him, and then lifted her eyes.

"Have your feelings changed towards me?" she asked at last.

"No," said Jeremy honestly. He could say that.

She put her other hand upon his shoulder.

"Arthur? Tell me. When are we going to be married? Ah! I'm modern enough for that. It's the most vital thing in life and I'm not going to be put off. Tell me, my dear one, tell me?"

The world swam round poor Jeremy. The rose trees seemed to be standing on their heads, and the solid earth to wobble like a switchback. Then his brain cleared, suddenly, and he saw his course clear before him. Here was a decision with which he could not trifle.

This touched rock bottom reality. He removed her hand gently. Then he drew a deep breath, and "went in off the deep end."

"You had better know the truth now. I am not Lord Amlett."

It was out at last. The words which had seemed as though they would never be spoken had spoken themselves. He suddenly realized they were not the words he had intended to speak. He had meant to break off the engagement. That was the solution he had agreed upon with Olivia. But it was done now. The extraordinary, embarrassing conversation in the rose garden had driven him at last to a declaration of his own identity.

Somehow he had been forced to cut clean through the impalpable mesh which surrounded him. Two short sentences and it was done.

"I never was Lord Amlett. I mean I never was Arthur Arthurton. I'm somebody else. Don't you

understand? I'm a cuckoo, a changeling, a sham antique. Heaven knows where Lord Amlett is. I don't. But I'm not he. It's all a spoof."

He glanced at her to see how she was taking it. He hardly knew what to expect. He was not prepared for that unmoved unemotional mask.

"Don't you understand? I admit it's a bit difficult to grasp. But I'm not Lord Amlett. That's the matter in a nutshell. What are you smiling about? I assure you it's nothing to smile about. It's a jolly serious business. I haven't been Lord Amlett ever since I came back to Pulldan Castle. I mean we changed places in London.

"And please, please believe me when I say I'd have given anything I possess to have spared you this. I tried to tell you before. I tried to tell you the first day I met you. I tried to make up my mind. But it wasn't easy. I was going away again. But all sorts of things began to happen. I'm sorry. Deeply sorry. But it was not all my fault."

"Why are you apologizing?" She was still smiling, a subtle smile, which seemed to come from deep within her brain.

"Why? . . . But . . . dash it all . . . I mean, Arthurton's a decent sort, and I hate . . ."

"You are funny, you know. You look so rumpled when you are really upset and bothered. It was the first thing I liked about you I think!"

About this point Jeremy gave it up altogether. He would never fathom this woman. She was beyond him.

"I give it up," he said.

"You dear," she said softly. "Can't you under-

stand? It's for me to apologize—and I do ask you to forgive me. I've known, if not quite from the first, at least for most of the time, that you were a fraud! It wasn't so very hard. There were all sorts of things. You couldn't possibly have been Arthur!"

That slow, subtle smile persisted. He had gone in off the deep end right enough, but it did not seem to have done him very much good.

"Well!" he said when his breath returned, "well, now you see, don't you?"

"But of course I don't see. What difference does it make? I'm not proposing to marry a title. I don't care whether you're Lord Amlett or just ordinary Tom Noddy."

"No. I'm not Tom Noddy. At least I don't think so. But, Dorothy . . . I suppose I'd better call you Lady Dorothy now . . ."

"Why?"

"You see, I haven't known you very long!"

She laughed at that, and then was serious. She began to realize that he was escaping the issue. He didn't want to marry her.

"Don't think hardly of me," said Jeremy, "and keep the secret. Only a few people know it already. And the others suspect it. But keep it dark. I'm merely the locum tenens. Arthur beat it for the back woods before his father died. And for goodness' sake have pity on me. I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or on my heels."

He left an angry woman when he finally went on his way. For she had told him plainly as words could tell that she loved him. And he had told her

as plainly as silence can tell, that it was hopeless. She saw herself set on one side by an adventurer, she who had pride and ancient lineage. He would have none of her. Then she thought of his halting attempts to quote and discuss poetry with her, and her sense of humor came back so that she smiled. She stayed a long time alone in the rose garden, sitting on an old stone bench, until the shadows deepened, and the bats came out wheeling silently through the dusk. She rose and walked slowly away, her pale yellow dress showing across the darkened lawns like some errant and unhappy ghost.

Jeremy in the meantime had set off walking like a house on fire. Driven into a corner where he could no longer find any decent compromise, he had at last owned up. There was a sort of fierce satisfaction in that. He plunged his hands into his pockets to find a pipe. His hand came in contact with a small volume of poetry he had been reading at odd times. He pulled it out and flung it violently across the hedges.

"No more of that," he said exulting.

He walked for miles, away across the hills into the dusk, trying to beat out some sensible solution of the problem. What if he just walked away now, and never came back? What was there to stop him? There was Olivia . . . there was his word to the man whose place he had taken. That wouldn't do. Mile after mile he tramped, and then as darkness began to fall he retraced his steps, no nearer in his mind to any possible solution.

He found himself nearing the station. He was tired. There might be a fly or a car down from the

castle if the last train had not gone through. Yes, the station was lit up. That was fortunate.

He went in, a bell rang, and a few minutes later the train came in.

Only one passenger got out, a man. Jeremy waited, but there was no sign of any fly or car. The one passenger seemed to be having an argument with old Milton, the station-master. Obstinate old mule, Milton. Wonder what was the matter with the chap? Jeremy heard angry voices. The train had gone. He went into the office. The full light was upon him as he entered.

"Why, it's Mr. Laytree!" said the man. "He knows me. He'll answer for me, I'll be bound!"

"That settles it," said the station-master. "That's not Mr. Haytree or any other tree. That's his lordship. My lord, this man says he's lost his ticket, and I'm going to charge him with traveling with intent to defraud. Then you come in and he pretends to recognize you, begging your pardon, as a Mr. Haytree or something."

"But . . ." began the man.

Jeremy silenced him with a look. Nothing could have been more unfortunate. He knew the man. There was no doubt about that. It was ex-private Ballan, once his old Army batman! What in the name of all that was wonderful he was doing here Jeremy couldn't think. Barely out of one scrape, he was already in another. His mind worked swiftly.

"It's all right, Milton," he said. "As a matter of fact I do know him. But why he should think my name is Maytree, I can't tell you. Shell shock, I expect."

"You ever been blown up by a shell?" he asked, hoping Ballan would tumble to it.

"No, sir," said Ballan.

"You idiot!" thought Jeremy. "Ever been buried by a mine? Anyway, it doesn't matter. You've had shell shock, and the result is, you don't know B from a bull's foot. Pull yourself together, man. And where's your ticket?"

"I lost it, sir."

"That's all right, Milton," said Jeremy. "I'll see that it's all right. I'll answer for him."

"Yes, my lord," said Milton, puzzled. "If you say so, my lord. But I don't know what the Company would say. All right, my lord. Good night, my lord."

But as the two men passed up the road alone, and he went the rounds to lock up the station, he mumbled to himself: "Shell shock, eh? Rummy sort of shell shock. Something very deep here. Now why did that man recognize his lordship as Mr. Laytree or Maytree or Haytree, whatever it is? I'm sure it's no business of mine. But it looks decidedly fishy. Now, I wonder . . ."

"Ballan," said Jeremy, as they walked up the road towards the Castle. "You're an idiot."

"Yes, sir," said Ballan.

"A first prize boob. You've given the show away to old Methuselah there."

"Yes, sir. What show, sir?"

"Well, I'm not Lord Amlett at all."

"No, sir. I never said you was."

"Don't be an ass. I'm supposed to be."

"Yes, sir."

For the second time within a few hours Jeremy found himself telling the unvarnished truth about himself. It was so refreshing that he began to fear he might contract the habit. Ballan listened in silence. Then he volunteered a suggestion.

"I'm sorry if I've put my foot in it, sir," he said. "But I saw your picture in a paper as the new owner of Pulldan Castle. It said nothing about lords, so I just thought you'd struck it lucky and came right along for the sake of old times to look you up. I'll go back right away, for I can see you're in a fix. But there's one idea, sir. You remember Colonel Jackson? Well, he's got a post in the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard. He was going to get me a job as a policeman. He's the man for your problem, sir."

"That's just what I'm afraid of," said Jeremy. "The less the C.I.D. hear about me, the better."

"But Colonel Jackson could hear the whole story, and he's got means of finding the missing Lord Amlett, and nothing need be said. He'd do it in a friendly way. Suppose I go back to town to-morrow and take a letter from you . . ."

"No, you don't. No letters."

"Well, I could go and explain things to him. He'd come up like a shot, I'm sure, sir. I'd like to help now I've made a bloomer. I'm not such a thundering ass usually, you know."

"That's true," said Jeremy. "I believe there's something in it. You go up to town tomorrow morning and fetch Colonel Jackson back here. Goodness knows, I've got into such a holy mess here,

I'd like to have another man's opinion. I can't see the blessed wood for the bally trees."

Jeremy didn't tell Ballan the worst of his difficulties. He didn't tell him of the anomalous position of Olivia, who was bravely pretending to be the sister of a man whom so many people were beginning to know was not the man he was supposed to be; of Lady Dorothy and her unwelcome love for him; of the thousand and one elaborate pretenses by which his miserable position was bolstered up; of the money difficulty; of the countless little mistakes and omissions which added to the cloud of suspicion and general bewilderment which was settling down on all who lived in Pulldan Castle. After all, if Ballan grasped the main idea, that surely should be enough for him. No use clogging his brain up with useless details.

The butler was puzzled when his lordship arrived at the Castle late and in the company of an entire stranger, with whom he sat up until two A. M. in the gun room, talking. It wasn't for him to gossip in the servants' hall. He could leave that for the footmen, who nobly fulfilled their duty in the matter. But it was queer.

The following morning the car was ordered for the stranger, and his lordship saw him off in person. That was queer too.

"Who was that?" the butler heard Olivia ask Jeremy, after breakfast.

But the butler did not hear the answer. Jeremy told her the whole story. He also told her that Lady Dorothy knew he was not Lord Amlett.

"My dear," she said, "if you tell many more people, there'll be no one left to know. And then it will be delightfully simple."

"Yes, and each one I tell immediately has a hold over me, and limits my freedom of action! I feel like Gulliver, already."

He did not tell Olivia the reason for his disclosures to Lady Dorothy. But she guessed.

"Poor old Jeremy," she said. "Was it very bad?"

"It was awful," he answered. "Worse than waiting to have a tooth out."

"By the way," said Olivia, "I wanted to ask you something. Have you heard any chance gossip about a mysterious woman in green?"

"No, why?"

"Well, I think you ought to know. I heard one or two odd remarks from villagers the other day, but they wouldn't say anything definite."

"What sort of remarks?"

"Oh, quite vague. Only it seems there is a stranger somewhere about who is asking questions. You know how anything out of the ordinary causes gossip in a village!"

"I do. To my cost. Have you ever seen her?"

"No. She comes into the village by train, I understand, and has been seen wandering about the Castle gates. I wondered . . ."

"My dear," he said gravely. "I don't quite know what your meaning is. But I can assure you I have no horrible past to come to sudden flower in a green frock. My present is quite horrible enough in parts. But whoever the lady in green may be, she has nothing to do with me."

The following day, as he went down to meet Colonel Jackson who had wired "coming immediately," the station platform was deserted. But as he drove off with his guest, he chanced to look back, and there for the first time he saw the woman in green, in deep conversation with old Milton, the station-master.

"Let 'em all come!" said Jeremy grimly as he put the car at full speed up the road.

CHAPTER IX

COLONEL JACKSON of the C.I.D., Ballan, Jeremy and Olivia held a council of war in the breakfast room the following morning. The first nip of early autumn was in the air, and a wood fire had been lighted, for at Pulldan very early rising was the usual habit. Jeremy sat on the high fender cleaning a favorite pipe; Colonel Jackson sat opposite him and Olivia remained in her high-backed chair, her head held high, and an imp of amusement dancing in her eyes. Ballan kept in the background: he felt that he was out of place, a feeling which was by the way shared by the butler. But his lordship's orders were orders, and there you were.

"You seem to have involved yourself fairly completely in every direction," said Colonel Jackson. "You might have got away with it if you hadn't begun signing documents. Put a pen into a grown man's hand, and he immediately relapses into second childhood. You should see some of the love letters . . . well, as I was saying, . . . the mess now is largely a financial one. If any of the injured parties . . ."

"There are no injured parties," said Jeremy. "I'm the only injured party!"

"What about the next heir to the title? What about Alec Shane? What about Lady Dorothy? Not financial injury, I grant it; but they've all reasons for not appreciating your imposture."

"Yes, and I'm up to be shot at by every one of the bunch! And they've all a grouse against me."

"If you take my advice," said Colonel Jackson, "you will gently and quietly disappear. Back to London. Never mind the title, never mind the Castle; forget all about Lady Dorothy and Shane. You'd better both disappear. And don't come back until the real Lord Amlett turns up. Don't show your face."

"But what about money? We've been living on Olivia's money all this time; and we're both fairly stony by now. The agent has enough in his general account to carry on with, but until I start playing with the ancestral booty, he's living from hand to mouth."

Colonel Jackson was one of those men who have the happy knack of seeing life as a series of possible alternatives. He considered the chances, ruthlessly rejected all plans but one, accepted that and carried it out without a backward glance. Such is the stuff of success.

Either Jeremy must remain at the Castle or go away. He could not remain. Therefore he must go away. Either he must go away with all his debts unpaid and with no ready cash, or he must have some money. The first was impossible. Therefore the second was inevitable. This is a wonderful system, and has never been known to fail. But for its complete success it needs some form of far-flung organization and discipline, such as the Army has, for instance. It works there wonderfully. Half the trouble after the war was due to the shocking discovery that

military method wouldn't work outside the Army. Colonel Jackson, of course, had never suspected any trouble. He had gone straight to Scotland Yard and had found the method worked there wonderfully. They understood it. It was part of the game. Unfortunately, Colonel Jackson's military methods made no allowance for the human element. In an army—a perfect army—there is of course no human element. If you tell Second Lieutenant A. that he will proceed by way of the first B in Boundary Lodge to the second A in Annas Farm, the assumption is that he will do it. Second Lieutenant A. is, as it were, one hypothesis in the general argument; either Second Lieutenant A. will get there or Second Lieutenant A. is a prize fool. But Second Lieutenant A. is an officer and a gentleman, and therefore cannot be a prize fool. Therefore we proceed on the assumption which by now is a certainty, that Second Lieutenant A. will get there.

Jeremy in this case was the mythical Second Lieutenant A. Colonel Jackson turned to him; calm, serene, unmoved, as though to show that to his more finely trained mind the problem was not, after all, insoluble.

"You must let the Castle furnished!" he said.

Jeremy glanced towards Olivia, fearful lest this vandalism towards the traditional dignity of Pulldan might upset her.

"My God!" he murmured. "These military-minded men! As though Pulldan were a seaside bungalow! Pull yourself together, Jackson."

"What other way out is there? You must have

some money. There is no other way of raising it. Seaside bungalow or no seaside bungalow, there is no other way."

"You know, you put the wind up me," said Jeremy. "All you military people do. If this was a war, for example, and you were looking at Pulldan Castle on the map, I can imagine your saying to the artillery in just the same calm way, 'That place will be in the way rather. Can you clear it for us?' And artillery with a positive grin of delight—but no other sign of emotion—would call up the heavies and proceed to wipe Pulldan out of the problem altogether. It's a delightful method. In a war. But it won't do here."

"But," said Olivia, "I don't quite see why not?"

"There's ingratitude!" said Jeremy. "I say my nice little piece specially for her benefit, and then she turns round and says . . . Ah, well! Go on. Do just as you like. So long as Olivia's happy about it, I don't really care if you take lodgers! It might even be amusing!"

Colonel Jackson was doing his best to keep a firm hand on the realities of the situation. It was unfortunate that his "Second Lieutenant A." was such a very human person. It made the problem almost incapable of solution. But he felt that by sticking tight hold of the basic realities he had managed to drive home one or two principal lines of action.

"What do we do?" said Jeremy. "Put a notice in the Post Office window? Like this?" He scribbled on a sheet of paper:

TO LET
FURNISHED
(Owner going to earth for the winter)
PULLDAN CASTLE
A DESIRABLE DEMESNE
H. and C.; stainless knives, and a gas fire in your bedroom.
No reasonable offer refused.

"That ought to fetch 'em. Or should it be a little more stately?" He grinned at Jackson.

"You are a lunatic, Laytree. We'll never make him serious, you know. He was just the same in the War. He'd have been a Staff Captain in spite of his infancy, if the Brigadier had had a sense of humor. Did he ever tell you about the eggs?"

"No. Do tell me."

"He was on trial as a sort of illegitimate aide-de-camp to the Brigadier. There was to be a vacancy for a Staff Captain later on, and the Brigadier was on the lookout for likely men. So he made Jeremy Brigade Mess President and Assistant Staff Captain. His chief work, so far as I could understand it, was to see that the Brigadier always had bacon and eggs for breakfast. It's not always easy in Africa, you know."

"The war got in the way frightfully," said Jeremy with a twinkle.

"Well, one day somebody introduced him to powdered eggs. Jeremy had never heard of them until then, and thought the war was as good as won. He gave them to the cook and told him to provide scrambled eggs and bacon for breakfast the follow-

ing day. The Brigadier had breakfast before the others and went out. At breakfast—about the marmalade period—Jeremy said to the Brigade Major, 'How did you like your eggs?'

" 'Jolly good, eh?'

" 'They weren't eggs,' said Jeremy. 'They were powdered eggs.'

" 'You don't mean it?'

" 'I do!'

" 'I thought there was something . . .'

"But the Brigade Major said no more until mess that night, when he began to chip the Brigadier. 'Like your eggs this morning, sir?'

" 'Eggs? Yes. What? What's the joke, Laytree?'

" 'No joke at all, sir!'

" 'Come on, out with it?'

" 'Well, they weren't eggs,' said the Major.

" 'What d'you mean, they weren't eggs? What's all this about, Laytree? What have you been up to?'

" 'Nothing, sir.'

"The Brigadier thought they were pulling his leg, and the Staff Captain who feared neither God nor Brigadier said: 'They were powdered eggs, sir. Sold in a packet. Probably never seen a fowl. Never heard a cackle.'

" 'Powdered eggs? What the devil do you mean, Laytree, by giving me powdered eggs?'

" 'Well, sir . . .'

"Just then the Mess Sergeant came in to bring the port. 'What do you mean, Sergeant, by giving me powdered eggs for my breakfast?'

"'I didn't, sir!'

"The Brigadier looked from one to another.

"'You had boiled eggs, sir. In the shell!'

"'Yes, I know. They were powdered!'

"Then Jeremy began to laugh. He saw through it. Somehow or other the cook had scrounged a couple of honest fresh eggs for the Brigadier. All the others had had powdered eggs. And now the Brigadier believed that his eggs in the shell in some mysterious fashion had been powdered eggs!

"'What's the joke, Laytree? What's the joke?'

"But he couldn't explain, and to this day the Brigadier tells the story of how he ate powdered eggs for the only time in his life, and adds always, 'You know, I suspected something all the time.' Jeremy could have explained, of course, but the joke was too good. Somebody else got the Staff Captaincy."

"It's quite true," Jeremy confessed. "You needn't laugh. That's the sort of luck I have. When I was born some perfectly diabolical old witch on a broomstick must have hung over my cradle and said, 'I give him a sense of humor. Poor kid.' I like to think she appreciated the enormity of what she was doing. Anyway, to come back to the house agency business. Had Ballan better slip down to the village and put this in the Post Office window next to the lost dog notice?"

"No. He had better do nothing of the sort. You want to do this properly. Put it in your agent's hands. He'll look after your interests. There'll be a lot of work to be done, inventories and agreements and repairs and a thousand and one things. Fortu-

nately I've a tenant who's looking for such a spot. He's American, and . . ."

"Say no more," said Jeremy. "It's his money we want. Oh, Lord Amlett, what a tangled web we weave, since you first taught us to deceive! You're going to have some nice surprises when you do come back. I had mine in installments. You'll get yours in one single issue, all with your name on."

"Poor old Arthur!" said Olivia. "I wonder where he is really?" Olivia had been rather more serious lately, Jeremy thought. He wondered occasionally, when he had time to wonder, which was not often, at her absorption. He could not follow her there. Of course, he could realize when he began to think about it, that all this which was something of a set strategical problem to him, was a matter of infinite concern to her.

She was still profoundly disturbed by the sudden deaths of her brother and her father.

The first had not been entirely unexpected, but the second had shocked her by its swift tragedy. She had cut herself off from all her friends, and the word had gone forth through the County that Pulldan Castle was not a place to visit for some time to come. She was disturbed too about Alec Shane. She had not told Jeremy of the scene she had had with him, when she had told him that his suit was hopeless. Only then had she really fathomed the bully that lay at the bottom of Shane's character. That was a bitter disappointment. She had been fond of Shane, in a spirit of friendliness; she knew now that that friendship was dead. She had been fond of Lady Dorothy, amused by her vagaries, her

ultra-fashionable whims, her extravagances; now she was afraid of her. She loved Pulldan Castle, knew every inch of its perfect park and woods; now it was to be let to strangers. All these things combined to trouble her, and, more important than all of them, there was the position of Jeremy himself. She could see the clouds gathering round him, in every quarter, could see the position becoming more and more hopeless every day. He bore it all, as she knew he would bear it, with a high courage, a joke, a laugh, in spite of the serious issues involved. And she loved him.

Since the day when they had ridden together in the early morning, and they had kissed, few words had escaped either of them of their real feelings. They had joked and laughed about their difficulties, made light of them, and even at times referred to some distant happy period when they might be free to marry. But they had both avoided any serious declaration of their feelings.

"I'm going to send Ballan off," said Colonel Jackson, "to make some inquiries. You'll excuse us. Ballan!"

"Yes, sir."

The two men went out, and save for the crackling of the wood fire, there was silence in the room for a while. Then . . .

"Jeremy!" The voice was soft, pleading.

"Yes."

"Come here."

He rose and stood beside her chair. She rose and faced him.

"Make a fuss of me," she whispered. "Just a

little. I'm . . . oh! I don't know . . . but I'm afraid. . . . It's all so complicated, and there are so many things against you."

He took her gently in his arms.

"Whatever happens, my dear one," he said at last, "we've got one another. We've done nothing dishonest. We've been forced into a particularly awkward corner. If it hadn't been for you, I'd have thrown in my hand long ago. As long as you're here, I don't care."

There were tears in her eyes as she looked up at him.

"I've waited a long time, Jeremy, and really I'm not a very good waiter. At times things seem almost too difficult to be borne."

"I'm a rotten waiter, too," said Jeremy, "but it seems to me that we're making a great mistake, waiting at all. I'm not sure that what is wanted isn't some sort of swift action."

"I should have thought you had had enough of swift action," she smiled. "Life has been fairly well packed with difficulties since first you met me."

"Since first I met your precious brother, you mean. He's the nigger in the wood-pile. If it had not been for him, there would have been no difficulty. I wonder where he is? You see, if he was anywhere in touch with civilization, he would have been certain to hear of what had happened. I sometimes wonder—" he broke off.

"What?"

"Whether he is ever coming back any more! Ah, don't take me too seriously, my dear," he went on, seeing her look of bewilderment. "It's only my pet

nightmare. I ride it occasionally at night when I've had a fairly peaceful day, just to keep my hand in, and to get used to the idea of the worst that can possibly happen."

"You're not making much of a fuss of me," she suggested.

"It's very difficult," he began. "I mean it's difficult not to, but, honestly, Olivia, I feel . . . well, I'm here under false pretenses . . . I don't want to take advantage. . . ."

"I hardly believed there were men like you," she said. "Now I know there is at least one, and in spite of all, I feel glad."

"I'm not much of a miracle," he said, smiling. "Just plain swob Jeremy Laytree. But I love you, Olivia. You see, somewhere in the world there is one man always for one woman. Sometimes they have all the luck, and they meet and then nothing else matters. Sometimes they haven't any more luck than a lost dog, and they don't meet, and there you are. Anyway, we met, and when we've worked our way out of this jig-saw puzzle, we'll tell the world."

For a long minute he held her to him and then kissed her. She clung to him, happy in the knowledge of his love, and in the certainty of her trust in him.

. . . . . .

Two or three days later, when the fact that Pulldan Castle was to be let had begun to trickle out, the Earl of Tray was riding down from the Hall and stopped at Mrs. Mellidew's cottage for a glass of milk.

"All serene, Mrs. Mellidew?" he asked her as he took the glass from her. "Here's good health to you, ma'am. Ah, that's better. You ought to get his lordship to mend that fence down by the brook. It's a disgrace."

"Yes, my lord," said Mrs. Mellidew. "But I don't know. It's not my business."

"What do you mean, it's not your business? Whose business is it?"

"You haven't heard the news then, my lord?"

"What news?"

"Well, they do say, my lord, that strangers are coming to Pulldan!"

"Strangers? What the devil— What nonsense is this? Strangers at Pulldan? What do you mean? Some silly gossip, I suppose."

"Indeed it's not gossip, my lord. But Pulldan is to be let furnished, and Mellidew is very upset about it. They've been here, Mellidews I mean, father and son, for longer than I care to say, and Pulldan's never been let before. It's against the tradition of the place, and the village is all beraddled about it. Though it's no concern of mine, to be sure. I'm quite happy in my little corner, and I don't want to interfere with nobody. But nothing seems the same since Mr. Arthur took the title, and how long we'll be left to enjoy what's left to us in peace, I'm sure I don't know. There's been so many changes up at the Castle, you know, my lord, and it's bound to make us a bit uneasy."

"But, good Lord, woman! You don't mean . . . this is serious . . . I'll put a stop to this . . . I never heard of such a thing. It's . . . it's . . .

Here, take this damn glass. Come up, you brute."

He pulled his horse's head round and set off for the Castle, determined to have it out with Arthur at once. Lord Amlett or no Lord Amlett, he'd have to observe the decencies.

"What's all this tommyrot I hear?" he said when he found the supposed Arthur in the stables.

"Which tommyrot?"

"This tommyrot. About letting Pulldan furnished. I never heard of such a thing!"

"Here, come out into the air or you'll choke or something," said Jeremy. "We'd better have a nice quiet talk about this!"

"Quiet talk be damned!" said his would-be father-in-law as he followed him out. "I don't want any quiet talk. I want an explanation!"

"I'm not aware that I owe anybody an explanation," said Jeremy, touching new depths of misery and unhappiness. He could see that the older man was furious. He didn't want a quarrel. But it was difficult to see how it could be avoided.

"What in thunder do you mean by letting Pulldan furnished? Why! It's . . . it's . . . monstrous."

"The place is too big for me. I can't keep it going. It's like a herd of white elephants and costs fabulous sums . I'm clearing out. I can't stick it."

"My heavens! To think it should have come to this! Look here, Arthur, I've known you off and on since you were breeched. I've always liked you. You were a bit wild. I don't quarrel with that. Give me a man with a bit of the devil in him any day. But, you know, this is ghastly. I . . . can't find

words. Look here, why don't you do what I say? . . . I've spoken my mind to you more than once since you came back. There's Dorothy fretting her heart out and too proud to show it, and here you talk about letting Pulldan furnished. To think I should be here to see it!"

"Please, please," said Jeremy. "Do try and understand my position. About Dorothy. Surely you know we have broken it off? That's all over. It's impossible. I should only make her unhappy. And I assure you that I've simply got to go away. I'd sooner let Pulldan than leave it standing empty. It won't make any difference to you, to anybody."

For quite a long time Jeremy thought the Earl of Tray intended to strike him. But the crisis passed and without another word he turned and left him, striding towards the stables.

"Hi! Give me my horse. D'ye hear!" he called, beside himself with fury.

A groom bustled out with the beast, held its head, and touched his cap, with "Good day, my lord," as the Earl rode off.

"Grrr-h-h!" said the Earl, and rode away as though ten thousand devils were after him.

. . . . . .

Three weeks later the supposed Lord Amlett sat alone in the gun-room. He was facing the writing desk at which Philip Arthurton had worked, and he hated his task. It was littered with papers, all of which had to be dealt with. There was the usual litter of bills, many of them now urgently in need of payment. There was a bank pass book which was a monument of human irony. It showed that the

account of Arthur Arthurton, now Lord Amlett, was in credit to the amount of £5,764. 13. 11, and a deposit account pass book showed a credit of £13,474. 9. 7.

"Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink," thought Jeremy. He was painfully hard up. Difficulties had arisen over the amounts received from the letting of the Castle, and the advance rent had been paid in to Lord Amlett's account. It was thus as inaccessible as any of the other money. Once more Second Lieutenant A. had defeated the military mind. For personal expenses Jeremy had borrowed £100 cash from Colonel Jackson, but the needs of his exalted position demanded that he should be able to sign checks. Several times, in his extremity, he had essayed the absent Arthur's signature. There was no doubt that if he presented a check at the bank himself, it would be met. No one knowing all the story could blame him. There was nothing wrong in it. He had been commissioned to carry on the absent man's life, in toto. He had done so under incredible difficulties. He had not touched a penny of the man's money. Nor did he intend to, and every time the idea had presented itself of using a signature that was not his own, merely to pay the other man's bills, he had avoided the issue, hoping against hope that the other man would turn up.

Now he was alone. Colonel Jackson had gone back to town; Ballan was on some obscure trail somewhere. Olivia was in town arranging for her stay in London, and once he was clear of details of business, Jeremy himself was going back to the flat

in St. John's Wood. The new tenants were due in the Castle at the end of the week.

There was a knock at the door.

"Mr. Shane to see you, my lord."

"Show him in," said Jeremy.

Alec Shane entered. He was dressed for riding, and carried a heavy crop. He looked the picture of health and physical fitness. But Jeremy did not like the expression of his eyes.

"He looks like something out of the inquisition," he thought. "Perhaps it's only my guilty conscience."

"Morning, Shane!" he said cheerily. "Take a pew. Will you smoke? You'll find Virginia in that silver box. Or do you prefer a pipe?"

"Thanks, I'll have a pipe," said Shane.

"Have a drink?"

"Don't mind if I do. I've been riding since eight."

Jeremy touched a bell, and ordered port and biscuits. He had learned that much of the habits of the —— Dragoons, that mid-morning was the time for port and biscuits.

"You're leaving the Castle, I hear?"

"Yes, letting it furnished. To an American who's stuck all over with loot. I'm going away."

"Ah! for long?"

"I don't know. I think we all need a change. May go down to Egypt later on."

"Finding the place too expensive? We all come to it. I'm a bit hard hit myself."

"Now I wonder exactly what Brer Rabbit's little game is?" thought Jeremy. "He's got some per-

fectly beastly proposition up his sleeve, which is going to take me in the wind in about five minutes. I can see it in his open countenance!"

"And by the way," went on Shane, "you may remember that monkey you owe me."

"Ugh! It's come," said Jeremy to himself. "And a monkey too! By which he means five hundred of the best! Blest if I knew I owed him £500. I suppose it's another legacy from my missing self."

"Yes, I remember," said Jeremy aloud.

"I'd be much obliged if you could . . . I hate to have to ask, but the fact is I'm in rather a hard corner myself."

"When do you want it?"

"Fact is, I want it now. I've had a sort of an ultimatum which expires in about an hour. I've tried every other way rather than worry you—fact, I assure you."

Open on the desk in front of Jeremy was the pass book with its tantalizing balance. Next to it lay the check book.

Shane must have seen both of them. Indeed he was looking in their direction now. No use saying he hadn't got the money. No use confessing; nothing was any use, save £500 immediately.

"It's a bit sudden," he said, in a flat, lifeless voice.

"Hardly that. Damme, it's been on the stocks for well over three months."

The man's voice was hard, determined. Jeremy disliked him more and more. It was obvious the fellow would have no mercy if he once really suspected the truth.

After all, why not give him a check?

The real Lord Amlett apparently owed him the money.

"There's your I.O.U.," said Shane, putting a slip of paper on the desk. "I hate to have to insist on it like this."

There was that in the tone of his voice which made refusal impossible. Jeremy's mind was made up.

"Cheer up!" he said. "I hate it far worse than you do."

He drew the check book towards him, wrote the check, signed it, and passed it over. Shane put it away in an inside pocket without glancing at it, and then walked over to the fireplace.

"There's one other thing," he said.

"Yes?"

"May as well be outspoken about it."

"My experience is, when people begin in that way, what they really mean is 'may as well be rude about it.' I hope that's not what you mean?"

The man's arrogant attitude angered Jeremy. He was more angry because he felt that Alec Shane had, after all, more right to be there than he himself had. He knew too that he had made a mistake in signing the check. It was curious how he reacted in spite of himself to Shane's brusqueness: Shane's hardness seemed to call up an answering hardness in Jeremy, so that he always went further than he intended to go. When he was alone, he was always making good resolutions about using tact and being diplomatic; when he was with Shane, he had an irresistible impulse to follow impulsive reckless whims.

"That's not what I mean," said Shane.

"Good. 'Cos I don't see why we should quarrel."

"It's about Olivia," said Shane, swinging his crop in his hand.

"I thought that subject was closed?"

"Well, it's not. So far as I'm concerned it never will be closed."

"I thought you had spoken to Olivia herself about it?"

"What's that got to do with you?"

"Don't be a prize idiot, Shane. Be an idiot if you like but don't be a prize idiot. When you brought the subject up before, I told you my advice was to clear out. You wouldn't listen. My advice is still to clear out. Not that I suppose you'll listen any more now than then."

"When I spoke to you last you were not the head of the family. You are now. For what it's worth, you've got all that was coming to you. Once and for all—I'm not asking for your advice—I want to know whether you stand by what you said in Palestine, when you told me to 'go in and win.' If I can persuade Olivia to change her mind, have I your support? Or must I count you on the other side, against me?"

"You've put the matter in a nutshell," said Jeremy. "I'm center forward on the other side. You've spoken out. You want me to speak out. Well, you can have it. If you were the last man on earth but one, and I was the other one, I'd say nothing doing. You can put that in your pipe and smoke it. If I can help it, you're not going to marry Olivia, now or at any other time. So that's that."

For one long silent moment, for the second time

that day, Jeremy thought there would be a rough-house. The Earl of Tray had wanted to punch his nose. Now Shane wanted to throttle him. Well, the rough and tumble of a good honest fight would be a positive relief after the long course of shadow boxing in which he had been occupied since Arthurton went away.

They faced one another, two perfectly sane and respectable English gentlemen, who, because of some inherent difference in their composition, hated one another like poison. The overwhelming desire to let their dislike have its way with them welled up, struggled for the mastery—and sank back. They had not moved.

Then Shane turned away and with heavy irony said,

"Thanks for your courtesy."

As the door closed behind him Jeremy sighed.

"Ah, well!" he said and turned once more to his papers.

But he was not left in peace for long. There was another knock on the door, and the butler entered.

"Begging your pardon, my lord."

"Yes, what is it?"

"I beg to give notice, my lord."

"Ah?"

"Yes, my lord. I'm sorry."

"So am I! What's all that whispering outside?"

"It's the other servants, my lord."

"Do they wish to give notice too?"

"Yes, my lord!"

"All of them?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Have 'em in!"

The butler showed the waiting servants in. Jeremy surveyed the crowd. Those nearest to him did not meet his eye, but their efforts to efface themselves were subtly circumvented by those in the background who had even less wish to take the front rank places.

They made an imposing crowd. Many of them he had never seen before. One or two he knew by sight. Others with whom he had come more closely into contact, he knew by name. So that was the cook, was it? and those nervous-looking slips of things with her would be the kitchen-maids?

The footmen he knew and hated. There seemed to be a surprising number of parlor-maids, housemaids, 'tweenies and other mysterious females of various sizes and ages. The chauffeurs were both there, and the grooms, and several odds and ends of people he could not place.

It gave him a queer thrill of something like fear to think of all these people dependent upon him. They represented Pulldan. They were part of the tradition, of the long-established routine of the place; they made him feel more of a fraud than ever. And, as always, beneath the realization of his difficulties and the superhuman effort to cope with an impossible situation, persisted that wistful note of regret. He had no place of his own. All these people had served him, respected him, obeyed him—as somebody else. Instead of establishing his own position in life, and building up again the name of Laytree, he had footled away his time, playing at being some one else. He, as plain Jeremy Laytree,

could have liked these people. The butler was a jolly old soul for example. But because of his impersonation they were his enemies. He was fond of the Earl of Tray, but because of his imposture, he had quarreled with him, finally and hopelessly, it seemed. He could have been amused and attracted by Lady Dorothy, but because of his position he was afraid of her. Every day he seemed to go farther away from what should be the real aim of his life.

"So you're all going?" he said at last.

There was a faint murmur of assent, as though the wind had passed through a copse of dead trees.

"Any complaints?"

"It's not complaints, my lord," said the butler, who was spokesman. "But we'd rather go."

"You don't like the idea of the Castle being let furnished?"

"No, my lord. But it's not that. We'd rather go."

This was something of a poser. Some of these people were old servants. He didn't like the idea of wholesale interference on these lines.

"Tell me," he said to the butler, "how long have you been with us?"

"Thirteen years next Michaelmas, my lord."

"That's a long time."

"Yes, my lord."

He turned to the housekeeper.

"And you?"

"Five years, my lord," she answered with a curtsey.

"What do you complain of?"

"Nothing, my lord."

"And you?" This to the first footman.

"Three years only, my lord. I have no complaints, my lord. But I beg to give notice just the same, my lord." His tone was lofty, distant as became a footman. He was a good footman.

"Um . . . I suppose you realize that you may put me in a very awkward position, all of you? I suppose that you will all want to leave in a week's time?"

"Excuse me, my lord," said the butler, "but perhaps I had better explain. We do not wish to work out our notice. We are quite ready to forfeit our notice money. We want to go at once!"

This was a bombshell!

"Is that so?" Jeremy asked the general company.

Again that faint murmur of assent passed through their ranks.

"You'd like to go now?"

"Yes, my lord," answered the butler.

"Right," said Jeremy. "You can go."

He turned away as though he had no more to say to them. His hands were tied; he could not speak out. He could see from their attitude that they were suspicious of him. The butler, for example: that rich and fruity old specimen must have known the man who ought to be Lord Amlett for thirteen years. Butlers saw a good deal. They were accustomed to watch and to say nothing. It was quite clear that they all expected to see him arrested at any minute. They were fearful too for their positions. They wanted to get away before the ship went down, and the state of Pulldan Castle col-

lapsed beneath them. He understood their feelings, and realized that it was his fault. These people were going to lose good positions just because he, Jeremy Laytree, was not the man he was supposed to be.

"Just one moment," he said, as the movement towards the door began among them. The whisperings ceased. Jeremy had seen a possible way out. It wasn't good enough that these people should suffer through him.

"You rather expected this to surprise me, I suppose. Well, it did. I hand it to you there. I hadn't exactly thought of anything of the kind. But I can tell you one thing. You're making the biggest mistake of your young lives. But because you're young and foolish, I wouldn't like you to hurt yourselves. I've accepted your notices. And I've told you that you can go, as you wished to go at once. But I prophesy that within three months at the very outside, you'll wish you'd counted ten. You'll want to be back at Pulldan again. Now listen. I'm going to write an order to Mr. Wilkins that the whole lot of you have been granted three months' leave with pay as from to-day!"

There was a gasp of astonishment. They had imagined all kinds of endings to this momentous interview, but not that one. There was something princely in the idea, something super-aristocratic in the gesture.

"If at the end of that time," went on Jeremy, "you are still of the same stiff-necked opinion, then your notices will be accepted. If on the other hand, you wish to come back to Pulldan at the end of the

period, you will be welcome. That will do then. I will send orders to Mr. Wilkins immediately."

"Ought to be full board wages," said a thin, sour voice, that of the second footman, a newcomer to Pulldan, a man generally disliked. He was not even a good footman.

"Ah!" said Jeremy, seizing the advantage. "That was Hopkinson, was it? Well, Hopkinson, as my offer does not meet with your approval, it does not apply to you. You are dismissed."

"Serves you jolly well right," muttered a parlor-maid. "I'd have bitten my tongue out rather than said that."

They filed out at last, and Jeremy was left alone, uncertain whether he had won or lost.

Once more came a knock at the door. The butler entered.

"Begging your pardon, my lord," he began.

"Yes? What is the trouble now?"

"Well, my lord, we've been thinking it over below stairs, my lord . . ."

"You're not going to apologize?" said Jeremy. "Never apologize when once you've made up your mind you're doing the right thing."

"No, my lord. But it's not that, my lord."

"Then what is it?"

"Well, if it's all the same to you, my lord, we'd rather not go. We've changed our minds, my lord. We don't wish to make things any more difficult than they are already, my lord."

"Thank you," said Jeremy.

"Then may I take it you will overlook what has happened, my lord?"

"Do you speak for all of them?"

"Yes, my lord. I may say when we were in the servants' hall some one proposed 'three cheers for his lordship!' "

"Ha! That's a rum idea!"

"Yes, my lord. That's what I thought."

Jeremy looked at the man who gave him the title and yet knew that he had no right to it. There was a subtle humor in the situation which appealed to both of them. But their faces remained comically grave.

"I shall be very happy for you to carry on as usual," said Jeremy, his eyes twinkling.

"Yes, my lord. Thank you, my lord."

And Jeremy turned once more to his littered table, remarking to himself, "I think I won that round on points!"

CHAPTER X

JEREMY'S bag was packed, all his preparations were made, the new arrivals installed in the Castle; he had played his part at Pulldan to the best of his ability—and failed.

"When you do come back, my worthy friend Arthur, I can't imagine you handing out any of the well done, thou good and faithful business. I've held the fort, it's true, but your reputation as a real live lord will need dry cleaning before you're able to use it again."

He thought of the inextricable tangle everything was in, and of the worse tangle it would get into if he remained any longer.

There was a knock at the door of the gun-room, where he had formed a habit of sitting, and Jos Polkins, the American pill manufacturer, entered. Jos was a good sort.

"Excuse me, Lord," he said cheerily, "but I wanted to mention one or two items."

"Fire away," said Jeremy, amused at his new title. "Will you smoke?"

"I think not. I been figuring it out and I can't see why you should make tracks for the undergrowth just because I've hired the place. If you care to stop right here, I'd be only too pleased. I'm a lonely sort of cuss myself, and I'd kind of appreciate your company. I've taken a hunch for you, see, and real people's kind of scarce in this area."

"Jolly decent of you," said Jeremy. "But the fact is I'm going to London incognito simply for the sake of escaping from myself for a little while. I should be happy to see more of you afterwards, but at present I can only hope you'll understand that I've got to get away."

Polkins, who was enormously wealthy, young, unmarried, and very appreciative of everything English, was feasting his eyes on the finished beauty of the lawns that stretched down from the window.

"I believe there's some one moving across there. Looks like a female," he said. "And, by the way, before you loose yourself on the world, would you mind putting me right on the females of these parts?"

"To tell the truth," said Jeremy, "I know next to nothing about them. I don't visit much, and for some time past I have been living in London."

"But tell me," said Mr. Polkins, who was anxious for information, "I want to get this right. Back in the States there, we sort of figure that the County families kind of go with the estate. You'd be brought up with 'em. You'd sure know them?"

"The war's changed a good deal of that," said Jeremy. "You see, I was out of England for years, and since I came back I haven't had time to pick up things."

Mr. Jos Polkins, who was a shrewd judge of men, looked quizzically at Jeremy.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I can see you're trying to put me off. I'm very sensitive to such things. Naturally, you don't want to hire the county families

along with the plate and the servants. I get you. I'm not dense!"

"Don't be a clown," said Jeremy, "or a bonehead or whatever it is you call it. I'm not trying to freeze you off. I honestly mean what I said. I don't snub people like that. If I want to tell 'em something I tell 'em. Dash it all, America hasn't got a monopoly of sincerity. You expect us to be snobs and then when you find something you think fits the theory you jump at it. I like you, Polkins. But you mustn't be so thin-skinned. We've got used to speaking the truth in England since the war. Perhaps the contact with America did it!"

Polkins roared with laughter at that.

"You get me right where I live with that!" he said. "You did me the honor to say you liked me. Well, I'm mighty proud of just that. And I'm relieved that you didn't try to hand me out any of the lord stuff. I must say I'd be real honest-to-goodness pleased if you'd stop on right here as my guest."

"I'd like to, but really I daren't," said Jeremy. "Perhaps some day I'll claim your hospitality in America."

"You would have a royal welcome," said Polkins. "I don't see why you don't hit right out to America and stay there. It is the country."

"I was afraid for a moment," said Jeremy, "that you were going to tell me it was God's own country!"

"That's one on us," grinned Polkins. "But, say, here, I'm serious on this. I want to see more of your kind in America. You'll pardon me speaking my little piece like this, but I've got it in my outfit

and I've got to spill it sometime. I came over to this little old country for two reasons. One was to get the right dope about it; that's easy as lying. The other was to find a Mrs. Jos Polkins."

"That'll be easier than lying," said Jeremy, "or it ought to be."

"Not so easy as you surmise," said Polkins. "I sort of feel rough over here. Unfinished. We're a young country, really. But we're going to do great things. But I have a hunch we're a shade too original for your women folk. They don't exactly cotton to us."

"I'd be very happy to oblige," said Jeremy. "What kind of a wife would you like?"

The moving figure they had seen emerged from the trees. As Jeremy watched, a wild idea came into his head. If only—!

"Don't think me a high flyer," said Polkins, "but she ought to be a lady, and her family should be the genuine article. It's not that I'm stuck on it, but my own tree's got its roots down in the south country for a hundred years and then some. She ought to have the kind of mind that'll take to new ideas as a dog takes to rabbits. And she should be a good looker. She should have brains: she'll need 'em."

Watching the distant figure moving across the lawns towards them, Jeremy reflected with whimsical delight that making allowance for the pungent slang, the description fitted Lady Dorothy to a nicety. What a solution! Then he groaned inwardly and added, what a hope!

"It's up to you, Polkins," he said. "No man can butt in on another's matrimonial plans. It's about

the most unhealthy No Man's Land known to civilization. You keep your eyes open, and when you see your chance, close on it and hold on."

"I reckon that dame is coming here," said Polkins.

"I reckon she is," said Jeremy, "and I don't want to see her. I'm not at home to callers. Besides you're King of the Castle now."

"Only too happy," said Polkins. "Could you put me right about the lady anyway."

"Well," said Jeremy, "that is Lady Dorothy, and if you'd like to do me a great favor now's your chance."

"Count me in," said Polkins.

"Well, then," said Jeremy, "Lady Dorothy is the only daughter of the Earl of Tray. They live at the Hall, not very far away. Their family is so old that the family tree makes you dizzy to look at it. You can read 'em up in Debrett over there. The Earl's a fine specimen of the real thing. Absolutely honest and quite sincere. Lady Dorothy is the light of his eyes. She bullies him, I believe. She's original. Almost terrifying. She's so original that it's almost dangerous to make jokes with her. She has rooms with green ceilings, and has had her portrait painted by a Vorticist. Nothing has yet been discovered that is too new for Lady Dorothy. In fact she belongs to the Society for the Prenatal care of expectant idea merchants. She's got a sense of humor, is very handsome—beautiful perhaps in a day after to-morrow fashion—and she's dissatisfied with things as they are. More especially with me.

"I'd very much like to be reported missing on this

occasion. I've told her about you, that you are to be at Pulldan for some time, and I think you ought to get on rather well together. You've got to begin somewhere. I suggest that a very good entry for you would be to stroll casually across that way, introduce yourself and tell as many full-blooded lies as may be necessary about my whereabouts. I want it to be understood that I have already left for London."

"I can't say I'm happy in the untruth supply department," said Polkins, "but I'll try it."

Jeremy saw him cross the lawn to meet her, saw them walk off together across towards the stream; they were much of a height, they were both wealthy, and Polkins surely represented exactly all that was newest and most original in tradition, culture and breeding.

"He drips originality and he's got sense," thought Jeremy, "and Heaven send that he likes shingled hair!"

He took a stick and a pipe, and after leaving instructions for his luggage to be sent on, he walked out of the Castle, and away. No one saw him go; no one cared very much whether he went or stayed, save his new friend Polkins. But as the great gates clanged to behind him, he felt a load slip from his shoulders. The worst, he thought, was over. Once free of the castle and its responsibilities, and back in St. John's Wood as an ordinary flat-dweller, he could breathe again.

As he walked down the long and lonely road to the station, he tried to think of the future. The real Lord Amlett was overdue, and within a short

time would return anyway. What was he to do then? What about Olivia? What about Lady Dorothy?

His attention was distracted by a faint sound from the wood which ran along the road most of the way to the station. It was thick and full of shadowed larch spinneys; it offered perfect cover. A great holly hedge ran for a long distance, screening everything behind. Jeremy stood still. The silence of the countryside closed over the wood and the road. Nothing moved.

Then, in violent surprising contrast came the sound of a breaking twig. Then silence again. Some one who wished to be unnoticed on the other side of that hedge had stepped on a rotten stick.

"Poacher?" thought Jeremy, and then realized that people don't poach in broad daylight. He moved on again, and, listening carefully, caught a succession of tiny sounds made by some one passing through the wood parallel to the road.

"Rum go. I'll look into this," he thought. The road was deserted, and he walked straight ahead until he saw a partial break in the hedge. As he came opposite to it, he turned swiftly and plunged through into the wood. A sudden glimpse of a disappearing figure, a startled "Oh!" and the noise of footsteps receding into the depths of the wood told him he had missed his object.

"But the soup thickens, my friend," he said whimsically, "and I am in the soup. For she was dressed in green, and she's the one who's been hanging about all this time. And I'd like to know what she's after, but she wouldn't stay to be asked!"

The feeling that he was leaving Pulldan Castle behind him made him reckless, so that when he saw old Milton, the station-master, pottering about, he chipped him about his lady friend in green.

"It's all very well, Milton, but I'm not the only one who has seen you talking to her. They tell me she's very attractive?"

"I don't know, my lord. It's none of my business. She asked me questions. I answered them as best I could, my lord."

"Well. If you should see her again," called Jeremy from his carriage, "tell her that she's a rotten conspirator. You're another, Milton. You're an old fraud really."

The train slid out of the station leaving a very puzzled old man. He could not reconcile Jeremy's attitude with his own suspicions. Rogues did not behave as this man behaved.

Later that day he had more to puzzle him. Lady Dorothy drove up to the station in a hurry for the afternoon train. She was in the magnificent new car brought by that Mr. Polkins who was now at the Castle. Of course if Lady Dorothy intended to be friendly with them, well, perhaps it was all right. She seemed in a bad temper of sorts and insisted on a carriage to herself with the blinds drawn and the door locked.

That is perhaps why she did not notice a running figure upon the road, the figure of a woman in green, who raced up to the gate, bumped into Jos Polkins as he turned to go, seized the station-master's arms as he was about to wave his flag, and taking advan-

tage of the momentary delay, jumped into a carriage and slammed the door.

Jos Polkins watched old Milton with some amusement. "Funny old prehistoric," he thought. "There's a lot of big things happening all round him, and he knows no more'n Cæsar's mule what it's all about. Poor fish!"

In which Mr. Jos Polkins did old Milton an injustice. Old Milton knew a good deal more than Mr. Polkins was ever likely to know, but he had the supreme power of looking like an idiot which is not given to every one.

Lady Dorothy was furious. She had been sidetracked by Mr. Polkins in a masterly fashion, but his new-world tactics were no match for her old-world subtlety. She had the truth out of him—"like a fully qualified dentist with an undesirable tooth," he put it—in less than no time.

She had begun to dislike Jeremy. The first fine exaltation of her love for him had disappeared; he had not helped her at all; he had hurt her pride. She summoned to her mental aid all the tradition of her race, all the quiet age-old pride of the stately countryside of which she was still a part in spite of her modern superficial crust, all her own self-pity and outraged self-esteem, all the damaged prestige and shamed self-consciousness, and from them she drew large and very satisfying draughts of bitterness. The absent Arthur's image glowed with a heightened color. She had been taken in by an impostor; she had made a mistake; it was the real Arthur whom she wanted, not this cuckoo in the nest. The liberties he had taken! He should pay for them

all. She would expose him. She guessed where he had gone. She would go straight to him and denounce him. Olivia should know the truth. Every one should know the truth. She began to appreciate the novelty of the situation, and its queer inverted drama. What if there were more in it than met the eye? Where was the real Lord Amlett? People could not be allowed to trifle with serious matters in this way. Somebody had to make a stand somewhere.

She saw herself as the guardian of her class, putting right an outrageous wrong, perhaps discovering a crime.

There was that man Polkins, for example, a decent sort of man, though he was an American. He had been taken in. They had all been taken in; and the man who had taken them all in was laughing in his sleeve, growing rich, no doubt, on the profits of his amazing impudence.

Jeremy might have appreciated the humor of this had he known about it, but he was all unconscious of the impending row. He was installed once more in the flat, had given Willett, his man, orders that he was at home to no one, and was preparing a little well-chosen dinner for himself and Olivia.

There were to be oysters, and cold salmon, plovers' eggs, and a pheasant, and he was looking forward to a long, peaceful talk with Olivia, safe from any interruption.

They had reached the fish when Willett approached his chair and murmured, "Lady Dorothy is downstairs, my lord."

"I'm out," said Jeremy.

"I know, my lord. But she insists on waiting. I think, my lord, she knows you're in."

The humor of the situation struck Jeremy, who of course had no idea of the violent conclusions to which Lady Dorothy had come.

"Put another cover, Willett," he said, "and ask her ladyship to come up."

"Ah!" said Jeremy, rising as Lady Dorothy entered. "This is unexpected."

"They told me you were out."

"Yes," said Jeremy, easily. "I told Willett I was not at home. But I hope you'll dine with us now."

Lady Dorothy kissed Olivia with more than usual warmth; and then, keeping her arm about her, said, "I have something I want to say first."

"Take my advice," said Jeremy. "Have dinner first. There's nothing like a meal for restoring the sense of reality!"

"Can't you ever be serious?"

"Not between courses," said Jeremy. "The salmon, Willett!"

He beat her on that point, and it was not until the dishes had been cleared away and coffee brought in, that Lady Dorothy was able to begin her task. Somehow, in this quiet room, lighted by candles and beautiful in its serenity, she found it very difficult. The man himself made it difficult too. He was curiously elusive. She found it impossible to pin him down.

"You had something serious to say?" he challenged her at last.

"Would you like me to go?" said Olivia.

"No, my dear. It concerns you. It concerns all of us."

Olivia looked at her with dawning amusement. What dramatic disclosure was this strange woman about to make? Olivia felt sorry for her. They had none of them been quite fair to Lady Dorothy, and if the disclosure was what she thought it might be, they would be still more unfair.

"I have come to say," said Lady Dorothy, "that I can no longer be a party to this farce. That is not Lord Amlett. It is not your brother!"

To her horror Lady Dorothy realized that Olivia was laughing. She rose, deeply affronted.

"No, no," said Olivia. "Don't go. I'm sorry I laughed. But really, it is too comic. I've known all along that he wasn't. You don't suppose that if he couldn't take you in he could deceive me, his own sister? I knew from the very first. There's no harm in it. Arthur is goodness only knows where. Until he comes back, Mr. Laytree is taking his place. No harm has come to any one. It's not his fault that he's supposed to be Lord Amlett. No harm need come to any one. You can denounce him if you like. But you'll find it difficult to persuade people that you know better than his own sister. Philip acknowledged him as his brother before his death. Everybody knows that. Where's your proof?"

Lady Dorothy was silent for a while. Her fine profile accentuated by her astonishingly individual type of hairdressing stood out against the dark paneling of the room. Her peculiar pallor was exactly the type which goes so well by candlelight. In

spite of her emotional excitement there was yet a smile in her eyes, the mocking fugitive smile of the woman who can only laugh at everything lest she should too easily cry.

Life had been kind to Lady Dorothy; it had given her beauty, wealth, friends, culture, amusement, a beautiful home, a long tradition; but the last gift was withheld, and she knew it.

She watched Olivia as the girl's eyes turned back to Jeremy. There was the explanation. Olivia loved him!

From a great distance she heard a voice come to her, Jeremy's voice that was so like Arthur's voice, that had so much in it she was to lose; she listened to its queer, warm tones, to the slight hesitations and mannerisms she knew so well, to the hidden laughter in it, and the faint note of wistfulness.

What did it matter to her what the man was saying? Soon she would not hear that voice any more. As though words mattered! She smiled, vaguely, half at herself, half at the scene in which she was taking part. She could see herself as from outside: she could stand apart in consciousness and watch her own attitude in the drama, reflect upon her own bearing and expression in the triangle; she was too self-conscious ever to find reality. She could only see reality through the veil of her own consciousness, know that it was reality, and pass on to the subtler hair-splittings of her own modernist creed.

Jeremy with Olivia at his elbow and Lady Dorothy before him, apparently in some sort of trance, mumbled incoherently. The voice which to Lady Dorothy's ears sounded so intimate, so musical, was

to Jeremy a washout. He was making a mess of things.

"I'm sorry, Lady Dorothy," he said haltingly, "but it's hardly my fault. I can hardly expect you to care a hoot for my difficulties, but when I was launched with a manservant and a stock of boiled shirts, I was told nothing of your existence. I was to live in this flat, and hold the fort. It was a lark . . . and a rotten lark at that. Well, it's done now. You know the truth, and you know that Olivia knows."

"I know more than that," said Lady Dorothy, with a puzzling smile, that had more hostility than friendship in it. She still held her head high, facing them as though they were two enemies, and she was afraid of their slightest movement. Her voice was cool and well under control, her big eyes fixed now on Jeremy, now on Olivia.

"I know she cares for you. Anybody could see that. Was that in the bargain, too?"

Olivia took Jeremy's arm. She was not in the least disturbed.

"It wasn't in the bargain. But it is now!" she said. "If you think you are going to give our self-control a jolt, Lady Dorothy, you'll have to think of something far worse. Jeremy and I are deeply involved in this business."

"I may add," said Jeremy, "that if it had not been for that fact, I'd never have gone on with any of it."

Lady Dorothy pondered this. Her eyes did not leave his face, nor did she show that she was hurt. She was reflecting that all those days when she had seen this man, when they had talked books and

poetry, discussed life and philosophies and their own futures, everything she had had from him in friendship, and, yes, even that too, even the saving of her life that day in the trap, all this she owed not to herself, but to Olivia. It was all for Olivia's sake he had done these things. It was because he loved Olivia he had stayed and put up with her, Lady Dorothy. For Olivia's sake he had pretended, he had learned smatterings of modern poetry, he had done everything—for Olivia's sake. Not for her.

That faint mocking smile faded from her face as she stood facing them. A hostile presence seemed to be in the room with them. Neither the cheerful candlelight nor the warm paneled walls, nor any other friendly thing in the room was enough to prevent that sudden birth of enmity. It was in the room with them like a physical presence. Lady Dorothy dominated the scene, standing slender and almost frail against the dark wall.

Suddenly Olivia turned to Jeremy, and he, anticipating her, took her in his arms. Still holding her, he said, "I'm a bit of an ass, I know, Lady Dorothy, but I've never willingly hurt any one yet. I had no intention of hurting you. And you must admit that when it came to the point, I told you the truth, rather than make a fool of you."

"Oh, you dear, delightful ass," thought Olivia. "Now you've put your foot in it!"

He had.

The shadowy sense of hostility which had filled the room like a ghost was blown from the air like cobwebs by the east wind of Lady Dorothy's answer.

"Thank you," she said, in cold, steady tones. "I prefer to think that I merely made a fool of myself. I think self-pity is easier to bear, don't you, than the other kind? I am sorry I interrupted you. Please excuse me. No. I can let myself out, thank you. Good-by."

There was nothing in the words: their meaning was all in the expression of her voice, in the balanced hardness of her eyes, and the exquisite chilliness of her manner.

"We've done it again!" said Jeremy, looking at Olivia. "Been and gone and done it!"

"She'll never forgive either of us now," said Olivia. "She'll be very dangerous."

"Ah, well! Promise me one thing."

"Yes."

"Promise you'll come to see me on visiting days at Wormwood Scrubs!"

CHAPTER XI

"YOUR bath is ready, sir!" The voice of Willet came through a hazy dream in which Jeremy was being pursued by all manner of worse disasters than those which had actually befallen him. For the first few moments, the scene of the night before with Lady Dorothy was confused and tangled with the dream, so that he found it difficult to grasp how much was real, how much was dream. He lay for a while in the great bed, contemplating a gray autumn morning. From where he lay he could see the sky, clouded with flat layers of pale gray. In one spot the filmy veils parted, and a wash of tender, rainy blue gleamed. At its edge a drift of cloud wrack caught the gleam of the hidden sunshine, glowed rose-pearl for an instant, and then disappeared behind the slow cloud curtains.

"A bad day, Willett?"

"Yes, my lord."

"I'll take breakfast here after my bath."

"Yes, my lord."

Jeremy looked at the calm, settled face of his servant. Alone of all the people with whom he had come into contact, this man Willett seemed to have no suspicions. He had accepted him from the first, and, though it was true that Willett had had but few opportunities of observing him, Jeremy felt safe with him. In fact, in the St. John's Wood flat, he felt more secure than he had for weeks. After

his bath he sat up in bed, wrapped in a gorgeous Indian silk dressing-gown, enjoying the first comparatively calm period of his visit to England. The toast was excellent, the marmalade his favorite kind, the coffee perfect. A bundle of letters which he did not open and did not intend to open, lay on the side table near the telephone. The *Times,* ready opened at the main news page, was at his hand if he wanted it. There was nothing to worry him, nothing to trouble about. The worst had happened, and he had had the good sense to cut clean through his difficulties and to return to a mode of life where difficulties were unlikely to crop up.

"I made a great mistake going to Pulldan," he thought, "and yet I don't see what else I could have done. I've never really had any freedom of action. I was forced to go there; I couldn't help the Lady Dorothy affair; I couldn't help Alec Shane's unfriendliness. And yet, I don't know!"

He was forced to the conclusion that he had made a mess of things.

"Now I've got a few minutes to think, it seems to me the best plan would be for me to take stock of the situation. Nearly everybody knows that I'm not Lord Amlett, and at the same time, nearly every one allows me to carry on. Lady Dorothy knows—has known all along, or so she says. Olivia, of course, knows. The servants at Pulldan if they don't actually know, at least suspect. What about Shane? He'd do me an injury if he could, but I don't think he's at all certain of his ground. He's puzzled but he's not sure of anything. It's to no one's advantage to expose me. It's to every one's

advantage to keep their mouths shut. But if it came to a pinch I should be in Queer Street. I haven't the foggiest idea in the world where that letter from Arthurton has got to. I ought to have kept that. It was the only bit of evidence I've got. Supposing any one did make trouble? How could I prove my case? There's Olivia, of course. She could swear that she knew my identity all along. But would they believe her? In any case, do I want her to be involved in any unpleasantness? It wouldn't be fair. I've not been fair to her all along. I'm a rotten impersonator. I had no idea it would be so confoundedly difficult."

He rang for more coffee and then decided to get up and go out for a walk. It was the only thing he could do. He had precious little money left, and he did not want to borrow any more from Colonel Jackson or from Olivia. He had no idea of the length of time that might yet pass before the real Lord Amlett came back to relieve him. He had no future prospects. He only knew that when Lord Amlett did return, he would have a nice fat bill to present to him "for services rendered."

And then, what about Olivia?

He had no settled job; he had little or no money. What sort of a future could he offer her? It was a bit thin.

He walked down through Regent's Park, and then turned eastward rather than face Piccadilly and the West End, where he might meet any of Amlett's friends. He saw himself condemned to a dreary infinity of walking the streets to kill time, unable to join in the real life of the position he occupied be-

cause of lack of money, and because of the fear of complications.

A thin rain began to fall and he turned back. Dash it all, though, stony or not stony, he would have a taxi. He summoned one and drove back home through the gray cheerless day. As the taxi drew up outside the block of mansions, a second taxi came to a standstill a few yards away. As Jeremy got out and paused to pay the driver, he noticed a woman getting out of the second car. Something familiar in the carriage of her head, in the poise of her body seemed to remind him of a woman he had known. Suddenly he realized where it was he had seen her before. This was the woman in green! This was the woman who had been seen in the village, who had watched him from the shelter of the wood on the road to the station, the woman who kept turning up at all sorts of odd moments and in the most unlikely places, without ever getting any farther. She was standing on the pavement now, apparently undecided as to her next step. She realized that Jeremy had seen her, realized that she must take some action unless she wanted to speak to him now and at once.

Jeremy put an end to her hesitation.

"I'm not going to have mystery women following me about," thought Jeremy. "I'm going to settle this now. Better the devil you know than the devil you don't!"

He walked along towards her, raised his hat.

"Excuse me," he said courteously. "But I have an idea that you want to speak to me about something?"

The woman laughed, a low, vibrant laugh which had something unsettled and unstable about it. Her face, thought Jeremy, was curious. A perfect oval, of more than ordinary beauty, it was marred by an extreme pallor. There did not seem to be any color in the skin whatever. Its pallor was opaque, a heavy dead white, while the lips were scarlet with rouge. Her eyes were far apart, but it was impossible to see much of them. They were like dark slits in the heavy whiteness of her skin; she rarely opened them to the full, but peered through her dark lashes at the world suspiciously. She was slim, straight, well dressed—in green as usual—and might have passed for a minor actress, or an artist's model.

"I do," she said. "I've been wanting to speak to you for some time."

"Then why didn't you do it?" said Jeremy.

"There is an answer," said the woman. "It's such an easy answer. I won't tell you now. You'll discover it yourself."

"Um! About as clear as mud!" said Jeremy brightly. "I'm not good at riddles. Anyway, we'll only get wet standing here. Will you come inside?"

She nodded and followed him into the flat. Some secret amusement seemed to animate her face; she was laughing at him, and yet Jeremy felt there was more than amusement in her manner. There was hostility and a certain independence, as though she knew that her position was unassailable, that she held all the aces.

"May I offer you anything?" he asked.

"No, thank you." The request seemed to amuse her.

"Why do you smile?"

"Because it is funny!" she answered.

"Sorry," said Jeremy. "My sense of humor doesn't rise to such heights. I can't see it."

"No, you wouldn't. I didn't expect you would."

"Well, would you mind telling me why you wanted to speak to me? Why you have been watching me? Why you didn't come straight to Pulldan Castle and ask to see me?"

"Really, all three questions are answered before they are asked," she said. "Really I have not very much to say to you. I don't think it is to you I ought to say it. But you seem to be a decent sort of man. I don't know why. I had not expected you would be quite like this. You look honest. You don't put on any airs. If I met you offhand anywhere, I should say you were a decent sort. But there, you never know. One never can tell, eh? Faces are nothing to go by. Men are very difficult."

Jeremy looked at the extraordinary woman, as she sat at the table, her gloved hand lying in her lap. She was absolutely mistress of herself and of the situation. And yet— What did she want?

"You haven't been following me about all this time just to discuss my face, have you? I mean, it hardly seems worth it. Suppose we come to the point."

"All right. I'm quite willing."

And then she delivered the final knock-out blow which laid poor Jeremy down and out. His castle of cards slithered pitifully to the ground, and he saw that the game was beautifully and finally up.

"You see," she said quietly, and her eyes sparkled

with amusement as she said it. "You see, I am Lady Amlett!"

If she had said she was the Queen of Sheba she could not have surprised him more. He glanced at her, hopelessly, helplessly, thinking perhaps he might be able to persuade himself that she was mad, or drunk, or demented. But one glance at those curious half-closed eyes killed that faint hope dead before it was born.

"Of course," he heard himself saying, "when you put it that way, I do see the funny side of it. Ha! Yes. Very good!"

"I'm glad you appreciate it," said his visitor. "I knew you had a sense of humor."

"Unfortunately, yes. It has always been my undoing."

"It may not be a misfortune," she said. "You may need it before long. I hope you see exactly how funny it is?"

"Oh, yes, thanks. It's uproariously funny. It's the best joke yet. Ha! Ha!"

"But it's not the sort of joke you can share with everybody, is it?"

"No; er—no, by Jove, it isn't." Jeremy shivered. "All the same, I wish you'd have let me into the joke sooner. Why didn't you?"

"I wanted to see just how far the joke would go," she answered, smiling. But there was no humor in her smile.

"It's funnier than you think," said Jeremy, thinking now that perhaps she was mad and had made a fantastic mistake. "I mean, you see, I am Lord Amlett."

"Of course," she answered gravely. "That's just it. It's so very funny that you did not recognize me, isn't it?"

"Yes," he groaned. "Beastly funny."

"For instance, where were we married, Arthur?"

"Heaven only knows. Southend or Blackpool—anywhere you like!"

"And where did we spend our honeymoon?"

"Ask me another."

"And why did you leave me? And where did I go to? And what was my name before you married me? Where did you first meet me? And how? And what was your first present to me? And mine to you?"

Question followed question, an interminable string of them. To none of them had Jeremy any answer. This was a chapter out of the Hon. Arthur Arthurton's life of which no one save the present Lord Amlett, the real Lord Amlett, could know anything. This was a test for which he was totally unprepared, an examination for which no books were any good. Even if the woman was bringing off a colossal spoof against him, which seemed unlikely, he had no facts to go upon, no evidence to produce, no bluff to put against her. But, once the shock was over, he determined to call her bluff. He had so far managed to avoid anything in the nature of an admission. It was her word against his, and after all he had been through he was not going to allow her to sink the ship without a fight.

"I'm glad you see the funny side of it too," he said. "Because I think it is still even funnier than you think. Which Lord Amlett did you marry?"

"I didn't marry Lord Amlett," she said. "I married Arthur Arthurton, who has since become Lord Amlett."

"Very interesting," said Jeremy. "But it's rather awkward that I am Lord Amlett and don't recognize you, isn't it?"

"Very awkward. But not for me."

"That depends on how you look at it. By the way, do let me offer you a little refreshment? I see that it is after eleven. It is a long-established Amlett custom to take port and biscuits at eleven o'clock. Will you join me?"

"Thank you."

He rang and Willett brought in the glasses and the wine on a tray. Jeremy watched Willett's face carefully, as he poured the wine and handed it. One point gained! Willett didn't know the woman from Eve.

"I should think it will be very difficult for you," said Jeremy. "You see, nobody knows you. I could put you through a cross-examination which would put you clean out of court. I don't see how you expect to carry your point. If I, Lord Amlett, can prove that until you started prowling round Pulldan Castle, I had never seen you in my life before,—and, of course, I can prove it—where do you come in?"

"I wonder whether you would like to prove that particular case before a jury?" she smiled. "I must say I admire your pluck."

"I don't see why I should be called upon to prove any case before any jury," said Jeremy. "The position is just silly."

"Yes, it is," said the lady quietly. "And on the

whole I think I had better simply call the police!"

For the first time in their interview Jeremy then believed he was dealing with the genuine article. She would never have dared suggest that if she had not been sure of her ground. What should he do? Try to call the bluff again? Temporize?

"Before you do that, have another glass of port," he suggested. She agreed, and the alacrity with which she agreed made him doubt again. He would call her bluff.

"You'll find the telephone in that corner," he suggested.

"Really," she answered. "You are a masterpiece. I have watched you for weeks and I must say that you have upheld the character in an almost perfect way. You look the part. You speak the part. You dress the part. But"—here she paused to drink again from the glass which Jeremy had again refilled —"but you are too charming to be the part. Arthur Arthurton, now Lord Amlett, is a very good fellow, I admit, but he hasn't your delightful air of—what shall I call it—mischief, camaraderie, happy-go-lucky humor,—I can't find the word."

"I take it this *is* a serious discussion, not a meeting of the Mutual Admiration Society?" said Jeremy. "You are suggesting that I am far too charming ever to be the real Lord Amlett. Would you like to tell that story to a jury—with two or three solid, sensible British housewives on it?"

"That's one to you," she admitted. "But I shouldn't have to tell that story."

"Well, let's get down to brass tacks. What proof have you that you're Lady Amlett?"

That was the crucial question. He had dodged round the point hoping that she would give him some indication of the case against him. But she was in no mind to give herself away. The duel of wits amused her for one thing, and the port was very good.

"For that matter, what proof have you that you're Lord Amlett?"

"I can bring yards of evidence. Acres of it. Any one will tell you who I am."

"As, for example?"

"There's my man here. He's known me long enough. There are my friends; my relations."

"Your only near relation is your sister," she answered quickly.

"Well, isn't that good enough?"

"I guarantee that when she knows what I know, she will realize she has made a mistake. She has accepted you because it would never have occurred to her to doubt. But what I can tell her will open her eyes to a thousand little details which before have merely puzzled her."

"What a hope you've got," said Jeremy. "If you take my advice, you'll go away quietly and forget all about this. Whatever evidence you produce will be laughed out of court by the side of the evidence of my own family and intimates."

It was the thoroughness of her enjoyment of the port wine that made him once more certain that she was bluffing him. He felt that there was something wrong with her. Real Lady Amletts would not consume four or five glasses of port at eleven in the morning, however violent their emotional state. He

tried to push home the advantage he had already gained. He could foresee a first-class scandal if he dealt with this situation in the wrong way.

"Worse than that," he went on. "You might even find yourself in an awkward predicament. I don't know what they do to people who go about saying that they are Lady Amlett when it is perfectly obvious that they cannot be. I should imagine they put them away somewhere quiet where they can't do any harm. I should hate to suggest that any such thing might happen to you after all the nice things you've said about me. Besides, except on this one point, I find you quite delightful. So few people are really refreshing."

She looked at him, but for the life of him he could not fathom her expression. It was impossible to tell what was going on behind those half-veiled eyes: the smooth pallor of her face betrayed nothing of her thoughts.

"Nor do I know exactly what they do to men who call themselves Lord Amlett when it is perfectly clear they are nothing of the sort," she countered. "I imagine they put them out of harm's way too. Wormwood Scrubs or somewhere like that. I should regret that too, for you have been very nice to me."

"We seem to have reached a deadlock," said Jeremy. "We must either produce our cards or just go on and on round and round in circles—admiring one another like modern boxers. I'm quite willing to produce my cards. Will you produce yours?"

"What cards would you like me to produce?" she said.

"There's only one possible ace in your hand," said

Jeremy. "That's the marriage certificate. I'm a great believer in the established institution of the land, and if you produce that, we may get on a little."

"Very good. That is the point: a very important point."

He thought he detected a shade of nervousness in her manner.

"If I produce that," she said, "what card will you produce?"

"You talked about sending for the police," said Jeremy. "That's my card, and to my way of thinking it's the ace of trumps. I'll produce Colonel Jackson of the Criminal Investigation Department."

She watched him without the flicker of an eyelid. She had happily stopped drinking port, and seemed to be looking far ahead in order the more carefully to safeguard any future steps she might be forced to take.

Jeremy walked to the window and looked down into the street below. To his horror, he saw Olivia approaching. He must stop her. He didn't want her to know anything about this supposed Lady Amlett, genuine or otherwise. If Arthurton had kept quiet about it, which he had, it was doubtless for some very good reason. It was up to him, playing Arthurton's part, to carry on the game. He had no knowledge of the real state of affairs, could have none save what he could trick this woman into revealing to him. His loyalty to the absent Lord Amlett made him realize that at all costs he must keep this thing to himself. When Amlett came back, he could put his own muddle right. He, Jeremy, did

not want to interfere. His actions with the servants at Pulldan had been determined by the same sense of loyalty. Like most men he put loyalty very high in the scale of civilized virtues. He wasn't going to let Amlett down.

"Excuse me one moment," he said, and going out he rang for Willett.

"Willett, my sister is at the door below. Will you please tell her that I am out, and that I left word I would be at the Savoy at one o'clock waiting for her."

"Yes, my lord. It is one o'clock now, my lord."

"I know it is. But she must not come in. You understand. Call a taxi for her and tell him to drive to the Savoy."

"Yes, my lord."

The bewildered Willett told the even more bewildered Olivia, summoned a taxi and packed her off almost before she could breathe.

"Now, whatever is Jeremy doing at the Savoy of all places?" thought Olivia. "I should have thought he would have had sense enough to avoid the West End. He's a queer boy. But perhaps— Oh, I don't know. I suppose it's all right."

Jeremy returned to the room. His visitor was sitting just as he had left her. She seemed to have endless time, and endless patience. She looked up as he entered.

He began to wonder how he was going to get rid of her. He couldn't very well put her out. He couldn't leave Olivia waiting for him at the Savoy indefinitely. She might come back. He had thought that if he could get rid of this woman quickly, he

would take a taxi down to the Savoy and rescue Olivia before she had had time to be puzzled.

"Well?" said his visitor, with irritating calm.

"It only remains to produce the evidence," said Jeremy. "I will meet you at New Scotland Yard at 3.30 this afternoon. You can then produce your ace in the presence of the police."

"I have met many men," she answered, "but never one quite like you. You are really the limit. I would not have believed it possible. Really, of course, you don't play up. This should have been a scene of mutual recrimination and abuse. But instead of that, you keep a perfectly good temper, and with the most fascinating humor, construct the most colossal bluff the world has ever seen. I must admire it. We needs must love perfection when we see it."

"Charmed if I've amused you," said Jeremy.

"I suppose you'll ask me to stay to lunch, will you?" she suggested.

"I should be delighted to have you to lunch here," he said. "Willett will look after you. Unfortunately, I am due—overdue at an appointment now."

"I think you ought to stay," she said, with a smile that in any other woman might have been called coy. "I don't like meals alone. Besides"—again that smile—"I've told you I like you."

"Great Heavens, what is happening now!" thought Jeremy.

"You see"—she closed her eyes until the long lashes swept her pale cheek—"you see, if you are Lord Amlett, and I have my marriage lines—well . . . don't you see . . . there's nothing to prevent my staying here all the time, is there?"

As the full implications of this amazing suggestion swept over Jeremy, he gave up all hope. This was worse than exposure; this was worse than anything. Loyalty to the absent Lord Amlett was all very well, but what in the name of thunder was he to do now?

What was it she said? Best get it quite clear. "If you are Lord Amlett and I have my marriage lines—well—" But it wasn't well. It was just awful. Unspeakably impossible.

The woman in green waited for an answer. She crumbled a biscuit between her finger-tips, moved a wine glass from one place to another on the tray, glanced at him from time to time, with a charming coquettish air, as though to give him courage. The silence lasted so long that she broke it herself.

"Who's to know?" she said at last. "Our marriage was secret. No one knows of it. What is to stop you acknowledging it in his name?"

"That's one fact gained anyway," thought Jeremy. "The marriage was secret. If I play my cards well, I'll get the whole story out of her."

"I know you are not the real Lord Amlett," she went on. "I knew Arthur Arthurton too well for that. Although he did not tell me his real name when he married me. But I knew all along who he was. Sometime or other he will have to acknowledge me. You may as well do it for him. I like you. You're quite the nicest man I have ever met. If you like to be nice to me, really nice to me, I'll keep silent. But—" She rose and crossed the room towards him, stood close to him and raised the heavy white lids of her eyes fully, so that he looked for

the first time into her eyes—"You'll have to be very nice to me. I've been very lonely, very much neglected, and I'm tired of it. What is your real name?"

"Arthur," said Jeremy. "Family name Arthurton; known to the world as Lord Amlett. Family motto *Soyez Sage,* which means 'Be good,' and I manage to live up to it."

"Drop it," she said angrily. "I tell you that I know you are not Lord Amlett. It's no use carrying on that pretense any longer. You need not be afraid of me. I won't give you away. Not if you don't wish me to."

She took hold of the lapels of his coat, coming ever closer to him. He had a close-up view of her face. The nose was too thin, the chin too hard, the cheek bones a fraction too high, but in spite of these details she was beautiful. And it was clear, painfully clear, that she was deeply moved, very much attracted to him.

"Why don't you speak to me, Arthur?" she said in a softer voice, and then, veiling her eyes, she added in a low tone: "I've done what few women would have done in my place. I'm modern enough too to know what I'm doing. I've asked you to be nice to me. I know you're an impostor. Well, I'll help you carry it off. I'll stand by you, and put you right on all the points you don't know about. I saw a lot of my husband. I know a great deal about him that no one else knows. I could shape your life so that if ever the real Lord Amlett were to come back, he would be turned down as the impostor and you would live in luxury for the rest of your days.

I could make you safe. But more than that. I could make you happy. You don't know what life is. You've never really lived. I can teach you how to live. Let me stay here with you, and I will give you more than your imagination in its wildest moments could conceive."

She lifted her face to be kissed.

"A little while ago," said Jeremy, in a dry ironic voice, "you flattered me on my possession of a sense of humor. I'm sorry that yours seems to have deserted you. I am very much flattered by your offer. Believe me, I am quite unworthy of it. I am just an ordinary sort of man, with very little to recommend me. But my acceptance of your offer, supposing that by some wild freak it were possible—which it isn't—would not be fair to you. I cannot help your delusions. I have had no part in creating them. But you must not go on like this. It's—impossible, incredible. It's more like a futurist nightmare than anything else. Please,"—he gently removed her hands from his coat—"please understand that I mean what I say. I admit nothing. I've nothing to admit. Your too generous offer to share my life as Lady Amlett is out of the question."

She stood back from him, leaned against the table edge, slim, inscrutable and dangerous, smiling as ever, and still mistress of the situation.

"Declined with thanks!" she said mockingly. "Not one man in ten would have done what you have just done. I said you were no ordinary man. But then, neither am I an ordinary woman. I'm not used to pouring out my heart to chance acquaintances. You don't seem to realize that I can blow all your

fine schemes sky-high. I hold you in the hollow of my hand, like a little handful of dust." She stretched out her hand. "Puff!—and there is nothing there! Once more, I ask, is that your last word?"

"Puff away," said Jeremy. "Scatter the dust to the four corners of the earth. After all, it's only dust. I can't stop you. I've said my little say. I'm not in the habit of changing my mind. I repeat, I am very conscious of the honor you do me, but I must decline."

"Sir Galahad!" she smiled, "wearing the white garment of a blameless life. Shall his little reputation be put in danger then? No, it shan't. Poor little reputation. Dear delightful little Sir Galahad. So pure. So blameless. And yet so reckless. So blind. So ignorant of what is coming to him."

"If you don't mind," said Jeremy, "I'd rather this conversation came to a sudden end. I don't think either of us will get much satisfaction from it. I can be very obstinate, and my appreciation of the funny side of it is wearing rather thin. If you don't mind, I will leave you. Willett will give you lunch."

"I don't want any lunch, thank you, Lord Amlett," she said with a smile. "I am going to remove my unwanted presence from your august person. But before I go, there is one thing I want to say. You have refused my offer. You may learn better sense. Your bluff about the police does not convince me. It is Thursday to-day. I give you until Saturday night. On Saturday night I will call here for my answer. If you turn me down again, I go straight to the police. I may not want for witnesses either. There must be other women who have seen through

you. By Saturday night you will have three courses open to you. You can produce the real Lord Amlett. You can accept my offer or you can spend the week-end—the first of many—in a police cell. No, don't say anything more—don't spoil a perfect situation. Just think about it. Au revoir!"

She blew him a kiss across the room, and a few seconds later he heard the front door of the flat bang behind her.

CHAPTER XII

IT was after two o'clock when Jeremy at last reached the Savoy Hotel. He found Olivia, hungry and tired, in the lounge.

"You're a nice one."

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. "I was delayed."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"Oh, no! It's all right now," he answered cheerfully.

Olivia did not press the point. She was a little hurt at his cavalier treatment of her. No woman likes to sit and wait for an hour in a hotel lounge, and then to be told it is nothing serious.

They went in to lunch and chose a quiet corner where they were not likely to be seen by chance acquaintances. Olivia hated that too. She was naturally frank and open in all her dealings. She hated hole-and-corner methods. She realized of course that it was not Jeremy's fault, but the realization did not make her like the situation any the more. The strain of the imposture was telling upon her.

Jeremy knew nothing of the long series of subterfuges, minor misstatements, and hastily improvised explanations she had been forced to enter upon for his sake. If it had not been for her fine loyal support he could not have carried on for a week without a public exposure. Jeremy himself was absent-minded and inattentive. It was quite

clear that there was something on his mind, and that he had no intention of sharing that something with her. Olivia asked and gave perfect confidence. "Trust me not at all, or all in all," was her guiding principle, and it admitted no shortcomings. She loved Jeremy. She was ready to trust him in everything, absolutely. She had trusted him very completely, and she had not been disappointed. But there were points in which his trust of her seemed wanting. He had avoided any conversation on the subject of Lady Dorothy for instance. She had felt that she could have advised him. It was too late now. It had come to an open breach there and the damage was done. He could have avoided quarrelling with Alec Shane, if he had only been more frank with her. And now there was something else upon his mind; what it was she could not imagine, and she would not add to his difficulties by asking.

They talked of indifferent things during lunch; their minds were not in tune: each was probing a different problem, and there seemed no point of contact.

"I'm afraid I've got to leave you this afternoon," said Jeremy, when lunch was over. "I've got some very urgent business to attend to."

"What about to-night?" said Olivia. "Shall we dine together and go to a theater? I'm dying to see a play again."

"I'll send a note round to your hotel if I can manage it," said Jeremy. "I'm not a bit certain of my plans. In fact, I don't seem to be able to get a grip on things. I'm like a man trying to get on

a merry-go-round which doesn't stop. Each time I put my hand out to catch hold, I think of something else, and my nerve goes. But never mind. I'll let you know."

"Till to-night, then," said Olivia.

"Till to-night," said Jeremy.

He summoned a taxi for her, and when she had gone walked down the Strand through the crowds, down Whitehall and to the gloomy cavernous buildings which are New Scotland Yard. He went into the enquiry office, a bare place of stone fireplace and many doors. A constable asked his business. Jeremy was conscious of an unpleasant sensation. He was in direct contact with the forces of law and order. The grim, forbidding aspect of the place depressed him. It seemed an idle threat in the calm, comfortable security of his rooms to call the police. Here it seemed quite another matter. This was the very center of the machinery of the law. Some day, perhaps, his record would be filed here; he had only to make a slip, and he would be involved in that slow-moving but certain machinery.

It was nothing to the point that he was innocent of any criminal intention. What he wished to avoid was the being caught in the machinery. For he had the normal man's detestation of the bare idea of such a thing. He knew that if he were caught, the machinery would have its way with him first. It would assume him guilty until he could prove himself innocent. The time would come, of course, when he would be brought into a court of justice, there to be assumed innocent until he was

proved guilty. The exact order of innocent and guilty seemed to matter as little as the hoary old problem of which came first, the chicken or the egg.

He began to read a notice by the door. It began with the one word "Wanted." Another next to it bore the same startling heading. There seemed to be quite a lot of people "Wanted." Scotland Yard, in its Victorian ugliness, seemed to be the center of one huge wide-spreading "Want." For the first time in his life he realized the meaning of the words "Wanted by Scotland Yard."

What a curious word to use: "Wanted." The more he looked at it the more forbidding it seemed. A harsh, sinister word, full of dark threats. It seemed to speak of a vast organization, moving untold thousands of obedient policemen; it was shadowed with the monstrous image of a policeman's hand descending on a man's shoulder; it typified the whole of the machinery of the law. "Wanted!"

"Ugh! The word gives me the genteel creeps," he thought. "I must get out of this."

A lift descended, revealing a policeman in its lighted cage. He looked, thought Jeremy, like some pantomime deity descending from Olympian heights. He eyed Jeremy dispassionately. Indeed, all the policemen had the same disinterested, unemotional air, as though they had listened to so many human fairy tales and unlikely stories in the course of their lives, that they no longer believed or disbelieved anything. They were not interested in Jeremy yet. Even when he produced his card

as Lord Amlett, they were not impressed. They took it as part of the day's work. "They'd be more careful about confirmation than some of the people I've met," he thought. "They look as though they believed nothing, but could believe anything. I suppose if I offered this chap half-a-crown, he'd bite it first. Of course he might bite me. Better not."

He stepped into the lift, and was shot upstairs. An impression of long gloomy corridors and stone steps further depressed him. A policeman on duty on the corridor stepped forward and Jeremy was passed on, feeling more like a parcel than a human being. His card was taken into a room, and he was left outside. After a while, the policeman returned, a faint shade more cordial than before.

"Would he step inside?" He would. To his enormous relief, when he stepped into the room he saw a brightly burning fire, and a secretary in civilian clothes sitting at a desk.

"Good afternoon," said Jeremy.

"Good afternoon, my lord," said the secretary. "Colonel Jackson will be free in one moment. He is very busy just now. That case—you've probably read of it in the papers—the Binge case."

"No," said Jeremy. "I—er—I rarely read crime news."

"Interesting case," said the secretary. "Impersonation and forgery, with a bigamy charge in the background."

"Yes, yes, very interesting I'm sure," said Jeremy, moistening his lips. "Curious what people will do, isn't it?"

"You'd say so if you worked here for long," said the secretary. "Why, you'd be surprised! A funny thing happened this morning for instance. A man was wanted for embezzlement. He didn't know we were after him, but we were. What do you think he did? He walked in here this morning as bold as you please, to lay information about a minor burglary! What do you think of that for sheer effrontery?"

"Jolly good," said Jeremy. "What did you do?"

"Pinched him, my lord," said the secretary, "as he was leaving the Yard! It's in all the evening papers, I believe. Wonderful how these papers get hold of things, isn't it?"

He smiled knowingly, but Jeremy had no heart to smile. After all, this man was merely one more of the dispassionate servants of the law. He could imagine the secretary at some future date, telling some other visitor, "Yes, called himself Lord Amlett; and had the cheek to call here too!" And the visitor would say: "What did you do?" The secretary would answer again: "Pinched him! As he was leaving the Yard!"

An inhuman lot! This fellow was no better than the rest of them. He had the same unexpressive eyes. Probably due to special training, thought Jeremy. He could imagine squads of policemen being taken to gaze upon the Sphinx, for instance, in order to acquire just that perfection of suspicious nonchalance and incredulous impartiality that marks the successful P. C.

"Tell me," he said, "why is it that all you peo-

ple here have a Scotland Yard face? How do you get it?"

"Eh?" said the secretary. "Scotland Yard face?"

"If you, for example, were to go to a fancy dress ball dressed as Cupid—I hesitate to suggest such a thing of course—but just as a hypothesis, I'd bet I could spot you were from the Yard just because of your expression. I remember when I was a child I was told by a skeptical father to believe nothing of what I heard and only half of what I saw. Well, everybody at the Yard looks as though he had that written in red ink and pasted up over his cot."

"I know what you mean. I believe the Scotland Yard face is a by-product of the endless stream of lies, subterfuges, evasions, half-truths and fibs that it has to meet with. We get all sorts here. Good, bad, indifferent and merely futile. Mostly futile. We have to judge by what we can see. Take yourself, for instance. You send me in your card with Viscount Amlett printed upon it. Well, to the best of my knowledge, you are his lordship. But you see how little there is to go on, don't you, my lord?"

"Indeed I do. Indeed I do," stammered Jeremy, horrified at the turn the conversation had taken. Why was he driven to talk to these people? If he could only keep his mouth shut—

Fortunately, Colonel Jackson's bell rang just then, and Jeremy was shown in to his room.

"For Heaven's sake, Colonel," said Jeremy, when the door had closed behind him, "do you keep whisky on the premises, or brandy, or any-

thing with a kick in it? Phew! I'm about through. That secretary of yours is about as cheerful as a wet Sunday in the North Sea. He put the wind up me. In fact, the whole of this place puts the wind up me."

"That's because you've a guilty conscience," said Colonel Jackson with a wry smile. "I believe the blameless ones can pass Scotland Yard without a tremor. In fact, your behavior is so highly suspicious that I'm not sure I ought not to arrest you on suspicion!"

"Don't be a goat. And that joke's not in the best of taste. Anyway, cheerio. I needed that."

"What's been happening?"

Jeremy told him of the arrival of the woman in green, and of their extraordinary conversation. He did not tell him of her amazing offer. That was no business of Scotland Yard or indeed of any one but the woman herself.

"She gives me until Saturday night to find the real Lord Amlett," said Jeremy. "What am I to do?"

"Honestly I don't know," said Colonel Jackson. "Your case was quite complicated enough without this. Once there's a woman in the case, it becomes hopeless. You never can tell what a woman is going to do. If she does land you in the courts, there'll be a holy scandal, and the newspapers will run the story to death. You see, you can't produce the real Lord Amlett."

For once, even Colonel Jackson's military short-cut failed him. The methods of war were not entirely suited to civil life. In war there was

always a clean cut-away. It might cost a lot, but nobody stopped to count cost or anything else in war.

"I can't see any solution," he said. "I'm snookered."

"What, you too?"

"Yes. It's peace time you know. I've had to confess more than once that there are complications I can't get at. Did I ever tell you of young Witherstall? He was Staff Captain with my brigade in France. He lived in a hut in an embankment. He had got everything into the most colossal mess. If he had been dishonest, it could have been put right, but he was merely inefficient and so nothing could be done. All his returns, leave lists, documents, everything, all in the same hopeless shemozzle. He solved it all quite simply. He had a very nice petrol vapor lamp. He fastened a string to it, tied the string to the door handle, and just closed the door.

"There was a delightful and very cheerful fire. There was very little left. That's the kind of decision I admire. Straight to the point. No regrets. Cut straight through all complications."

"You couldn't start another war, I suppose? Nothing else seems any good. As you say, I can't produce Lord Amlett. As a matter of strict impartial accuracy I can't produce anything."

"The woman might be useful. Do you know anything about her?"

"Nothing at all."

"Um. I think that no harm would be done if we made a few enquiries." He touched a bell.

"Send Ballan in to me."

"What, old Ballan here?" said Jeremy.

"Yes; he's been trying to locate your friend with no success so far. He traced him down to Southampton, and then lost him. He thought at first he'd gone to the Continent. But I brought him back to be ready for emergencies. Ah! Ballan. Another little job for you."

"And for God's sake, Ballan, do your best!" said Jeremy. "You'll find the lady somewhere in the neighborhood of my flat."

"What do you want to know about her, sir?"

"I want her photograph, her address, her past history, her real name, and anything else about her you can find," said Colonel Jackson, after explaining the situation.

"Yes, sir," said Ballan, accepting a hopeless task as though it were quite in the day's work. The Army had taught Ballan a good many things.

"You'll need money."

"Yessir."

"Report to me personally by letter immediately you discover anything and let me know when you go."

"Yessir."

"That's all, then."

"Yessir."

"Wonderful chap, Ballan," said Jeremy. "His monosyllables almost give me confidence."

"I'm glad of that," said Colonel Jackson, "because they don't have the same effect on me."

"You mean that . . ."

"I mean just this. He's got precisely the same

chance of finding anything worth having that you have of winning next year's Derby—about one in a million."

"Thanks," said Jeremy. "You are really comforting."

"Don't worry, old chap. I'll do my best. And if the worst comes to the worst, for goodness' sake communicate direct with me. I'll do my best to put things right."

Jeremy passed out, along the forbidding corridor, down in the cage of the lift, and through the office, with mingled feelings of alarm and amusement. He passed out of the building, and across the Embankment, where he stood for a moment contemplating the great ugly gates. At any rate, he had got safely out. He hadn't been pinched as he left the Yard. That was something. He decided to walk home. He could think better when he was walking. He had plenty to think about. It was quite clear that Colonel Jackson, from the light of his experience, took a serious view of the latest developments. In fact, he had seemed much more serious than Jeremy had expected. Did he know more than he admitted? Was there something on the carpet of which he himself knew nothing? He went carefully over the conversation again, but found no consolation in it. He had heard no further word from Lady Dorothy. He wondered what her next move would be. He did not even know whether she was still in London. He doubted very much whether she would take any active steps. She was, he thought, hardly that sort. Curious that both the women

who had known Arthurton in the old days should have adopted much the same attitude towards him. If he had been a rascal, his way would have been easy. But the crash would have been bigger when it came. It was coming. There was no doubt of that. He could see it looming larger every day. Every step he took, every incident in his life, seemed to bring nearer the inevitable day when the whole fantastic scheme must melt away and leave him exposed as a fraud. Unless the real man turned up in time. He would see the way in which his enemies would use the evidence against him. Since he had taken Arthur Arthurton's place, and the real Arthurton had unaccountably disappeared, two Lord Amletts had died, and he, the impostor, was now using the title. That would look very fishy. In the hands of a clever counsel that would be absolutely damning. And Lady Dorothy, supposing she pushed matters to that extreme, would be certain to employ the best and most expensive counsel that could be got. He would not have a chance. And, supposing that the real Lord Amlett did not turn up? Never turned up? Supposing that he was dead? People did die, and already the Amlett family seemed to have got into the habit of dying suddenly at the most awkward of moments. Supposing he was never found? And he, Jeremy, was put on his trial? It would be a more serious charge then than impersonation. There was Alec Shane, too. He would join in the hunt with the greatest of pleasure. He would be affronted in so many different ways. He would be furious that an impostor had forbidden him to try his luck

again with Olivia. He would be infuriated by the insult to his regiment; he would be angry that an adventurer should take the title of Lord Amlett. Lastly, there was Olivia. She would be dragged in. Her name would be dragged through the courts. She would have to give evidence. He could imagine eminent counsel for the prosecution:

"You ask the jury to believe that you knew this man was not your brother?"

"Yes."

"If that is so, why did you recognize him as your brother?"

"Because I believed in him. I knew he was speaking the truth."

"Had you ever seen this man before the occasion on which you saw him at your brother's flat?"

"No."

"Never?"

"Never."

"And yet you believed him?"

"Yes."

"Did he give you any proof of his extraordinary story?"

"Yes. He showed me a note from my brother."

"Have you the note now?"

"No."

"Do you know where it is?"

"No."

"I suggest that you cannot produce the note."

"That is correct." (Sensation in Court.)

The imaginary cross-examination beat itself out

in his brain as he walked on. Everywhere around him people were hurrying home, stopping now and again where the froth of evening newspaper placards made a sudden flutter of color, to buy their favorite paper. He could see them all, in 'buses and tubes, reading the evening papers, scanning their columns for the news from the law court.

Some day that hurrying crowd would perhaps rush to buy papers whose flaming placards advertised "The Amazing Lord Amlett."

"Revelations by Lord Amlett's sister," or "Cross-examination in the Amlett case."

He set his teeth. Loyalty was all very well in its way. Loyalty was easy when there was only oneself to consider. But when loyalty began to hurt other people, to threaten other lives, it was time to reconsider the position. He quickened his pace. He hurried round the corner into his own street, not noticing Ballan, who was already on duty, not noticing any one or anything.

"Willett," he cried when he found himself once more at home. "Take this down to the *Times* office with my compliments. Tell them to put it in the Personal column to-morrow morning without fail."

"Yes, my lord," said Willett, and departed.

Jeremy collected all the money he had left, amounting to a little over twenty pounds. He put changes of linen and his shaving kit into a bag, took a raincoat over his arm, chose a stick, and then changing his mind, came back to write a note. It was brief.

"My Dear:

"Hoping this finds you well as it leaves me at present, and all that sort of thing. I have just been to Scotland Yard and got cold feet. There are various last straws which have busted the unfortunate camel. In fact, so many straws that you could make a good-sized haystack. As a matter of fact, I am turning over a new leaf in good time for the New Year. . . ."

He looked at what he had written.

"It won't do, you silly ass. She'll think you've gone mad."

He tore it up and made a fresh start.

"My Dear Olivia:

They won't let me be a brother to you. And I'm sure the air of Wormwood Scrubs is not suitable. . . ."

He tore this up. His pen seemed as unruly as his tongue. He knew what he wanted to say, but how was he to strike just the right note of sober gravity, when he felt neither sober nor grave? He began a third.

"My Dear:

I am leaving the ranks of the nobility. I have not come to this conclusion without several headaches and a fair selection of nightmares, but I have at last decided that I had better go before I am violently propelled.

Circumstances over which I have no control—lovely, round, satisfying phrase that—leave me with no alternative, save a discreet hiding place in the undergrowth. I am this century's prize failure. Nothing that I have done has succeeded, and I have managed to put more people's teeth on edge than is healthy.

I ought to have been a non-starter. You'll find all your brother's papers in the most ghastly mess, and the keys of his safe are in the pipe rack."

He read it over, swore a bit, twisted it into a spill and lit his pipe with it.

"One more try," he said grimly, and wrote:

"My Dear:
Good-by. I ought never to have come.
Jeremy Laytree."

He addressed it to Olivia, left it on the desk and went out, Lord Amlett no longer, but plain Jeremy Laytree again.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Jeremy left the flat and all its responsibilities behind him, he walked down to the Underground Station, undecided in his mind what to do. The safest thing to do perhaps was to stay in London. London was a good hiding place. One had only to look at the hurrying thousands of home-going workers to realize that one man's identity would more easily be lost in that stream than anywhere else. In one of the quieter districts, say Bloomsbury or Finsbury Park or Woolwich, he would pass unnoticed. That is, if he cared to bury himself, and not to go abroad much in daylight. He hated the idea of that. After all, he was not a criminal. Why act like one? He could of course go to the Continent. He thought of his slender stock of money. The Continent is a merciless place for those with no money. He ruled that out. He could go back to Africa, but he hadn't enough money for his fare. Whichever way he looked, there seemed no outlet. He was there, a young, strong, educated and physically perfect specimen, with no aim in the world, no place for him, nothing for him to do. There was no reason why he should go to one place more than another. There were only two places barred to him, Pulldan Castle and London.

He reached Charing Cross, and studied the "departure" board. The first train out was to a

place called Cowfont. That would do as well as another.

"Cowfont, please," he said to the booking clerk.

"First, sir?" said the clerk, flatteringly. "Next window."

"No, third, single, please."

"Ah," thought the clerk, "another of the new poor. Pre-war you wouldn't have caught him traveling third. No wonder the Company can't afford to give us a rise!"

Jeremy had a carriage to himself. There seemed to be few people going to Cowfont, and although the train stopped frequently to encourage passengers to patronize it, Jeremy found himself the only one to get out at the tiny station. It was growing dark, and as he walked along the road to the village he found his spirit soothed by the great peace which brooded over the place. To the north the sudden noble line of the North Downs cut off the stars. Here and there patches of chalk shone above the dark purple shadows of the spinneys at the foot of the Downs. A bird chittered softly as he passed, and from across the fields came the sound of a dog barking. After the uneasy rush and worry of London, the place was like a quiet pool of peace.

"I was a fool not to come to the country before," he thought as he walked. "This is all real. A man could live here."

Already the impossible problems of Lady Dorothy and Lord Amlett had faded: they were part of the noisy confusion he had left behind in London. Behind that line of Downs was the red glare

of London, but the hills were high enough. He saw nothing but the stars.

Lights glimmered down the road, and when he reached them he found himself in a curious old world village; he turned into the Inn, the Three Bellows, and called for a glass of ale.

There were several countrymen in the bar, drinking ale and smoking.

"Stranger to these parts, sir?" said the landlord.

"Yes," said Jeremy.

"Ah!"

After a while a second question came.

"Staying hereabouts?"

"I don't know," said Jeremy. "I'm looking for a place to stay."

"Ah!"

"You don't know of anywhere where I could find a room for a while?"

"Would you be wanting it for long, sir?"

"I don't know."

"Um!"

Again there was a pause. At that moment the landlord's wife came in. She bustled up to the bar, nodding cheerily to the company.

"Was the gentleman asking about rooms, Sam?"

"Well," said Sam. "Not exactly asking. Just making enquiries. Aye."

"Sam's my man," thought Jeremy. "Andante with no variations is his speed. He's the most restful thing I've struck. Sam, I'm going to cling to you. You'll do me good."

"Why didn't you tell the gentleman we have the front room empty? You men!" She smiled

cheerily, and the men grinned back at her. "It's a nice room, sir," she went on, "and it's that sunny in the mornings you'd think you were on the Reveera!"

"I've never been there," said Jeremy. "But I'm sure the room is delightful. May I see it?"

"I'll get Susan to put it straight," said the landlord's wife, "and then I'll show it to you myself. Give me your things, sir."

She took his bag, coat and hat and stick and went upstairs.

"You're in luck, Mister," said one of the company.

"Yes?"

"Why, yes. If she hadn't taken a fancy to you, you'd never have seen the inside of those sheets. She's a rare independent one, Mrs. Hart, isn't she, Sam?"

"She is that," said Sam.

"I'll have another ale," said Jeremy, "and perhaps these gentlemen—?"

There was a cheery sound of five pewter pots being banged in the bar in immediate answer to his suggestion. Jeremy was a success. His room which he saw later was a delightful place, spotlessly clean, smelling of the country. He ate a supper of bread and cheese and ale, for he had no wish to demand set meals at unheard-of times. He was going to live simply, quietly and peacefully —and to forget.

After his supper, he strolled up the road with a pipe, thinking of all he had left behind, and most of all of Olivia. He had made up his mind

to forget her, and naturally, once his mind was free to concern itself with other than immediate and pressing affairs, it turned naturally back to Olivia. For her sake he had gone on with the imposture; for her sake he had finally given it up. He was lost now and they would never find him. No one would expect to look for him in this quiet country place. He could settle down for a while, and forget Olivia in peace. That is, he could do as he was doing now, fill his mind with the thought of her. Wonder what she was doing? Whether she had received his note and what she made of it?

"Oh, what's the use?" he said aloud. "And echo answers, 'What?' "

But echo did not answer what. Echo answered something which sounded suspiciously like "damn." There was a violent noise in the brushwood of the coppice on the bank above the road, a noise rather like a young elephant in a plantation; a branch went off like a bomb, and without any further warning a figure rolled and slid down the bank into the roadway.

"Are you hurt?" said Jeremy.

"Were you the silly ass spouting out about echo answers what?" said the angry man.

"I'm afraid I was," said Jeremy. "I'm sorry I seem to have put you out. I was merely thinking aloud."

"I thought you were some love-sick yokel," said the man. "I've twisted my infernal ankle. Give me a leg up, there's a good chap."

"Go steady," said Jeremy. "Can you stand on it?"

"No. I'm dashed if I can."

"There's a stone here. Sit down and I'll get your boot off before it swells."

The man sat down, and Jeremy removed the boot swiftly. Then dipping a handkerchief in the ditch, he bound the cold bandage round the ankle in the dark.

"I say, you know your job," said the man. "Where did you learn that trick of bandaging? It's as firm as a rock."

"Africa," said Jeremy. "Had to be up to dodges there, you know. A crocked ankle might mean anything if it wasn't looked to at once."

"Jolly decent of you to take all this trouble."

"That's all right. If I give you a lift, you'll be able to walk. Do you live far away?"

"No. This is part of my place, as a matter of fact. I was out after a moth. My net's over there. D'you mind? I like moth-hunting. Get some rare specimens sometimes. I was just on one when I heard you. I suppose I must have been startled. Anyway, the thing got away. I made a move and fell through the beastly hedge."

"Suppose we make a move," said Jeremy.

"You're a stranger here?"

"Yes. I only arrived to-night. I'm staying at the Three Bellows."

"Are you! You're lucky. Mrs. Hart's the limit about putting people up. Sure you don't mind coming out of your way?"

"Not a bit. Strictly speaking, I haven't a way. All ways are the same to me just now."

When they reached the Cedars, a big house some

three hundred yards from the road, standing at the end of a long circular drive, Jeremy looked at his companion. He was a man of about his own age, obviously an ex-officer, a man of wealth and leisure, a man of the class which Jeremy desired to avoid above all others.

"I'll leave you here," he said. "I hope you'll have better luck."

"No, you don't. You're coming in. Come in and have a drink. The old man would like to see you, I'm sure. By the way, my name's Weathers. Dibdin Weathers."

"Mine's Laytree. Jeremy Laytree."

"Well, come in; Dad'll be in the smoking-room, I expect."

Jeremy followed his new host with a feeling of envy. This man was very like himself, but he had a place in life, a father of whom he was obviously very fond, a beautiful house here in the very heart of English beauty, a settled, respected, established tradition.

"Dad," said Weathers. "Here's a new pal of mine. He's just picked me up out of the road with a sprained ankle, or very near it, bandaged me up like a medical student, and brought me home. Then he wants to do a guy at the front door."

"Glad to meet you, sir."

"And I," said Jeremy. "My name is Jeremy Laytree, sir."

"Like Dibbie to leave out the most important part of the introduction. Been after those damned moths again, eh? You'll break your neck one of

these days. What did you say—Laytree? I knew a Laytree at Cambridge years ago."

"At Emmanuel, sir?"

"Yes, by gad. Are you Emmanuel too?"

"Yes, sir. I should think it must have been my father you knew."

"Well, well, to think of that. And how is old . . . let me see . . . old Bulger . . . that's it . . . old Bulger? Why, of course, I remember him. Damned good times we used to have together. How is he?"

"I'm sorry, sir. He's dead," said Jeremy. "He's been dead a good many years now."

"Eh. I'm sorry to hear that. You're only a young chap too. Dibbie, ring that bell. You'll take a drop, will you, and stay and smoke a cigar? Damme, don't say no. I can't have old Bulger's son picking my boy out of the hedge like a blackberry and then going off."

"He's staying at the Three Bellows, Dad," said Dibdin Weathers.

"The devil he is," said the old man. "Well, he needn't stay there if he doesn't want to. Dibbie, see that his things are brought up here to-morrow morning. Now, no argument. I ask you to stay and that's all there is to it. Why, old Bulger . . . damn my eyes. I'd give anything I've got to have him here again, and now I meet his son, d'you think I'm going to let him go without a word!"

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate your kindness," said Jeremy. "As a matter of fact, it

will mean more to me than you can possibly imagine. That is one reason why I do not wish to presume upon it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Only this, sir. For the sake of my father's memory you have asked me to stay with you. I must tell you that I came down here so that I could live very quietly, at the minimum of expense, and in some seclusion while I thought out my future. So far, I am pretty much of a dud. I have about twenty quid in the world, and though I have every hope of making good, at present I am merely a gentleman of leisure without independent means. I don't want to force my affairs down your throat, but I don't want to accept anything under false pretenses."

"Too damned particular by half," said old Mr. Weathers. "No good riding a horse half as high as that. Sure to fall off. But it does your honesty credit. I've got one son, young Laytree. There he is. A fine specimen of a man, and he'll do something big in his research work yet. I'm proud of him. But I never had but one. There's room in this house for more than one. You're welcome to anything I've got. Damme, if I can't do as much for old Bulger's son, I'm not much good!"

"But I've got to work for my living, you know!" said Jeremy. "I can't just sit around and sponge. Don't misunderstand me. Meeting you and hearing you talk like that is like seven blessed miracles one on each day of the week. You see, my real trouble is that I haven't anybody who wants me.

I shall be very happy to count you as a friend, sir, in memory of my father. It means a lot to me. I've suddenly put my hand on the anchor, and I thought it had been chucked overboard."

"Well. What's to stop me finding you a job?" said old Weathers. "God knows there's lots of work to be done. Do you know anything about estate management?"

"I've run plantations out in Africa," said Jeremy, "and I know the straight run of most farming. I know how to handle men pretty well."

"Right. That's the ticket. Since Dibbie here took to chasing those damned moths—not that I mind that, he's doing very good work—but the estate's gone to pot. The fences are nothing but firewood, and the gates scream their shame to heaven every time you open 'em. Do the place good to have a young man about. Do you ride?"

"It'll be heaven to get on a horse again," said Jeremy. "But really, sir, I don't think I ought—"

"Stuff and nonsense. Not another word. You can stop at old Mother Hart's to-night, but I'll send a trap down for you early to-morrow morning. Then we'll talk business. And you'd better not stay here too long to-night. Mrs. Hart likes to get the place shut up early. We'll meet again to-morrow."

"Then I'll say good-night, sir," said Jeremy. "I'm glad to have met you. Not for the offer you have made me. You may think differently about that to-morrow. But because I feel that I've found some place where I'll be welcome. That's quite a new feeling to me."

"Haven't you got any friends? Damme, a young fellow like you—"

"I've not been back from Africa very long, sir. I can't quite find my bearings as yet. Things seem to stand on their head if I look at 'em."

"All he said was 'Echo answers what,' and I fell out of the hedge like a comet," said Dibdin.

"Well. It was a good sign. He put you straight. We'll put him straight. Look here, remind me to-morrow and I'll tell you that story about old Bulger and the fireman. That was a good one, that was—but not to-night. Off you go."

Dibdin Weather's ankle was by now sound enough for him to limp to the door with Jeremy.

"You've made an enormous impression on the old Dad," he said. "I've never seen him so taken with any one before. I'd be glad, too, if you'd think over what he said. We don't have many friends, and I liked you from the first, in spite of your being Cambridge. I was Oxford myself, but we can agree to differ about that. Anyway, don't turn down the old man's offer just yet. He means it, and I promise you there'll be bags of work to do and worth doing."

"Thanks," said Jeremy. "I couldn't have thought of it if you hadn't said that. It was decent of you. You see, you know nothing about me. I might be anything."

"Don't forget old Bulger, as the Dad calls him. It's mostly your father's doing, although if the old man hadn't liked you, he'd have been close as an oyster."

"Cheerio then!" said Jeremy. "I may blow in to-morrow."

"Well, do your best. The old man will be deeply disappointed if you don't."

They parted, and Jeremy walked back to the Three Bellows with new life. The whole incident was threaded upon such a slender skein of chance, that, seen in retrospect, it had the appearance of a dream. In all England, he had chosen Cowfont by sheer chance; chosen that road by pure chance, been at hand at that moment by pure chance.

As a result he had found what most he desired, people who knew at least something about him, people who had known his people, who cared for him because of the past, and because of tradition.

Since he had been back in England, Jeremy had felt this lack in himself acutely. Especially had he felt it at Pulldan. There the smooth perfection of the ancient tradition had reached its highest. Everything had been in its place, born, bred, trained and grown for that place.

Only he, Jeremy, had had no connection with that or any other place. He had felt it with Olivia. She had her friends, her position in the world. People knew her, knew of her, knew her family and could place her. But he had been an outsider, so much so that he had taken another man's place, and for a while had taken it successfully.

His very success had been a sign to him that he had no place among these people.

When he had left St. John's Wood, and had

wondered where to go, the feeling had grown so intense as to be almost a pain. He loved England, but it seemed that if he wanted England, he must begin from the very beginning and build up a place for himself. Colonel Jackson and Ballan, of course, knew him, but they were war-time friends. They liked him and were very decent to him, but he had never felt that they were bound to him by any real, deep ties. Here at Cowfont he was known, recognized as his father's son, accepted not as Jeremy Laytree, an outsider, but as a Laytree, as some one who had a right to his name, and a position by reason of that name. Before he had been nobody, a man passing under an assumed name even. Now he felt that he was somebody. He had reëstablished his identity, and a quiet content filled his mind. It altered the whole of his attitude towards Olivia too. She did not seem so far away. And he walked under the stars singing, happier than he had been for many a long day.

CHAPTER XIV

THE Honorable Olivia Arthurton sat before her dressing table in her room at the hotel. She had been expecting a note from Jeremy. And the note had come. This was the end then! She had read it over and over again, and gradually her courage had failed her. She had cried, not so much for the bitter disappointment of her own case, as for the thought of the unfortunate hunted Jeremy, driven at last by stress of some unexpected happening or other to abandon his place. Poor old Jeremy. She smiled even through her tears at the vision she had of him, as he must have been before he wrote that note. How like him to strike just that note, as though it didn't matter, as though to hide the seriousness of what had happened to him. And that was all. She had lost him. She had failed him. Something, some strain she had not foreseen, had driven him out, back into the wilderness from which he had come. Poor lonely, unwanted Jeremy. For she loved him, now more than ever. She believed that he loved her, though there had been but little opportunity for love-making. There had been but elusive fugitive glimpses of their love, like sunshine on an April day. They had had to watch every step, for fear of betraying themselves. Well, now it was all over. He had gone. They had driven him out between them. What could have happened? So

far as she knew everything remained as it had always been, awful no doubt, but not too awful. What new complication had arisen to make matters so much worse that even Jeremy, whose courage had been so wonderful, could bear it no longer?

Supposing that she had really and finally lost him? She thought of her life before he had come into it, out of the blue. It was all changed. Before he had arrived there had been Pulldan, her father, her brother, her friends; there had been Arthur and his flat in St. John's Wood, and a sure welcome for her whenever she came to Town. Now there was nothing of all that. Pulldan was let to a stranger; the habits of her former life were all broken; the flat in St. John's Wood was empty. She began to realize how completely Jeremy and Jeremy's interests had filled her life; how much she had built upon his comradeship, his loyalty and his humor. And his love. For she had never taken his protests very seriously. She knew that she loved him, more than anything else, more than all the habits and affections of her former life. He was her man. That was all. If he had gone and for good, then it didn't matter very much about her past or her present. She could pick up the threads when she wished. They were always there. She could go back to the set in which she belonged and live her life. But not as before. Before Jeremy had arrived it had satisfied her; she had been quite happy. She had been emotionally unawake, taking her pleasures as they came, not seeking or striving after anything very much. That was all changed now. She had

been undisturbed before, secure in the measure of happiness she found about her; it was different now that she had glimpsed another subtler, more exquisite, contentment.

She couldn't leave it at that. All her dreams were not to end in just that queer little note—a few words scribbled upon a piece of paper. In any case she would not sit down under it.

She ordered a taxi and drove to St. John's Wood. Willett was there.

"His lordship at home, Willett?"

"No, milady."

She went into the room. All was as usual.

"Just a moment, Willett. I want to speak to you."

"Yes, milady."

"Do you know where his lordship has gone?"

"No, milady. May I make a suggestion, milady?"

"Yes, anything you can tell me now will be of the greatest possible assistance. Don't hide anything. Tell me everything that has happened to-day."

"Well, milady. I don't think his lordship is coming back."

"Why not?"

"He asked me to go down to the *Times* office this afternoon with a notice for the personal column. It said that Lord Amlett was leaving town for an indefinite period."

"It did not say where?"

"No, milady."

"Has anybody been here to-day?"

"Well—" the man hesitated.

"Willett," said Olivia, "if you hold anything back now, I'll never forgive you. I feel like slapping you already."

"Yes, milady. Then I may speak out?"

"Of course you may."

"A lady called here this morning. In fact, his lordship brought her in with him when he came back from his walk."

"What kind of a lady?"

"She was dressed in green, milady."

It was more what he did not say about the lady in green than what he said, which showed Olivia that Willett did not approve of the morning's visitor.

"How long did she stay?"

"Till shortly before two, milady."

"Then she was here when I called?"

"Yes, milady. You'll pardon me, but I think his lordship didn't wish you to meet her."

"Never mind what you think, Willett. Tell me what happened."

"They both went off before two. Not together. Then his lordship came back here in the evening."

"What time would that be?"

"As near half-past six as I can remember. Then he wrote that notice for the *Times,* and it won't be in to-morrow morning because I was too late. I went off with it. I telephoned it in order to save time. When I came back he was gone. There was a note for you, milady, and I sent it by messenger. That's all I know. His lordship has taken a bag, milady, with a change of linen, and his light coat. Nothing else, save his razors."

"And that's all?"

"Yes, milady."

"That'll do. Thank you, Willett."

"I hope I haven't been at fault, milady?"

"No. Certainly not, Willett. You've done what you were asked. Thank you very much."

"Thank you, milady."

Left alone, Olivia pondered the mystery. Who was the lady in green? She had heard of her before, from Jeremy himself. She had heard of her at Pulldan. She would like to meet this woman, who had such disturbing power. She drummed with her fingers on the table. What could she do? Where could she turn for help? For Jeremy's sake she had cut herself off from her friends for weeks past. She had no one. Alec Shane was impossible, Lady Dorothy equally so.

"What can I do? What can I do?" she repeated. There seemed no answer. Then she remembered Colonel Jackson. He was on the telephone. He might be still at Scotland Yard. It took her some time to find the number in the book. And when she did, Colonel Jackson of course had gone. She put through a call to his house outside Epsom, and at last got in touch with him.

"Colonel Jackson, this is Olivia Arthurton speaking! I'm in very great trouble, and I want you to help me."

"Delighted to do anything I can," he answered. "What's the row?"

"He's gone," she said lamely.

"Who's gone?"

"Jeremy!"

Colonel Jackson was under no misapprehension as to the feelings of Olivia for Jeremy Laytree. But he groaned afresh when he heard her call him Jeremy. "These women!" he thought. "Hopeless." He himself was a bachelor and spent his leisure growing cucumbers and breeding Airedales. He had no time for women, pretty or otherwise. But he liked Olivia and would do anything he could to help her.

"Do you know why?" he asked.

"No," said Olivia. "Do you?"

"Yes," said Colonel Jackson grimly. "But it's not my business. Look here, it's too late to do anything to-night. Come round and see me at the Yard to-morrow morning. We'll see what can be done. Don't worry about it. To my mind it's the first sensible thing he's done. Only don't worry."

"I'll try not to. Besides, I don't know that I wanted him to do anything sensible. We were getting along quite well without anything of the sort!"

"If he'd had any common sense he'd have gone long ago," said Colonel Jackson.

"Common sense can be a very stuffy virtue. It's like most things that are good for you—it tastes nasty!"

"That's only because it's strange. It's an acquired taste, you know!"

"Well, I'll come round to the Yard first thing. Will you be there at eight o'clock?"

"No. I will not!" he laughed. "I'll be there at nine for your special benefit. I'll give orders you are to be shown in right away."

"Thank you so much," said Olivia. "Forgive me for troubling you."

"That's all right. Good-by."

She had hardly replaced the receiver when there was a knock at the door.

Willett entered with a letter on a tray.

"For me, Willett?"

"No, milady. For his lordship."

"Well, he's not here."

"I know, milady. But I thought you'd like to see the letter, milady. It's addressed to his lordship. But it's addressed in his lordship's own writing. And the postmark is Knollburgh in Scotland, milady."

"But he couldn't have posted a letter from Scotland," said Olivia, thinking of Jeremy. "He couldn't have got to Scotland by now."

"No, milady. That's what I thought, milady."

A wild hope rose in Olivia's mind. She took the letter from Willett.

"That'll do, Willett, thank you."

"Yes, milady," said Willett, and bowed himself out without any trace of anything that could be called an expression. He was a perfect man servant. The letter was addressed to "The Honorable Arthur Arthurton."

Olivia turned it over in her hands. She knew perfectly well that she intended to open it. She could tell at a glance at the first line whether it was the letter she believed it to be. The mystery which puzzled Willett had no puzzles for her. This, by the look of it, ought to be a letter from

her brother, the real Lord Amlett, to the man who was taking his place. If Jeremy had only waited a few hours! The fact that it was addressed to Arthur Arthurton showed that wherever the real Lord Amlett was he had no idea of what was happening or of what had happened. This was a clew too valuable to be neglected. She slit the envelope, took out a sheet of note paper, saw that it began "My dear Laytree," and knew that she was right.

But save for the heading Knollburgh, there was no address. That was a blow. The letter was dated two days previously.

"My Dear Laytree:

This is just to let you know that I am still alive and not yet at the end of my patience. I'm having the time of my life, and hope that you are enjoying the flesh pots.

By the way, I'm afraid I came away without making the proper sort of financial provision. I always was a fool about these things. I enclose six checks duly signed. You can fill in the amounts, but you will notice they are each endorsed 'not more than five hundred pounds.' Three thousand should be more than you have any use for, and I hope you don't blue the lot. It's for an emergency. I often wonder whether you've been spotted yet, but if you stick to St. John's Wood, and keep out of the family's reach, there's no risk. I hope you have made a friend of Olivia. She really is a brick when you get to know her. If you should come across her, be very nice to her. In fact, I enclose a seventh check for £100 with which you can buy her something she wants for her birthday which is on the first of November. I don't expect to be back. Cheerio!

Yours,

Arthur Arthurton."

"Well!" said Olivia when she had read the note. "If men are not the most wonderful creatures! At a time like this, to think of me, to be so perfectly charming, and yet to forget to give his real address! When he ought to know that Jeremy will be gasping to hear it."

But then she remembered that the letter and the checks had come too late. Jeremy was not gasping to hear anything. He had gone, driven out by a mysterious woman in green, and she, to whom it mattered more than anything else in the world, had not the slightest idea where Jeremy was. She rang the bell for Willett.

"Could you arrange a bed for me here, Willett?" she said.

"Certainly, milady. There's his lordship's own bedroom all ready."

"Right. I'll stay here to-night. And please ring up my hotel, and ask my maid to pay my bills, collect the luggage and come on here at once. I'll stay here until his lordship returns."

"Very good, milady."

"I'd better be at headquarters," she thought. "Anything might happen now. I've got to be ready for it."

The following morning she was up early and off to Scotland Yard. She was shown straight up to Colonel Jackson.

"Any news?"

"None about Mr. Laytree. Some about my brother. We'll come to that later. You said last night that you knew why he had gone. Tell me!"

"My dear lady, I'm sorry but I can't."

"It had something to do with a woman," said Olivia, "who called at his flat yesterday."

"Miss Arthurton," said Colonel Jackson, "I'm an old man—compared with you children. Let me give you a warning. Never judge a man or a case without all the evidence."

"Don't be silly, Colonel Jackson. I'm not judging Jeremy. I'm not jealous, if that's what you mean. Why, the thought never entered my head. I don't think of things that way, that's all. I don't know who the woman was. But it's very important we should know, because she has achieved what nothing else could have achieved. She has driven him away."

"I ask your pardon," said Colonel Jackson. "I must be older than I thought. Such a mistake in psychology is unforgivable. It was I who was judging without having all the evidence. Now what about the news of Lord Amlett?"

She showed him the letter.

"You'll pardon my saying so," he said when he'd read it, "but his lordship strikes me as a little reckless. Oh, I know that his trust in Jeremy Laytree is justified. I know Laytree well. But his lordship could not have known him for long. Yet he seems to have the most complete confidence in him."

"Yes. Exactly three thousand, one hundred pounds' worth," said Olivia. "Jeremy inspires confidence. I'm only surprised that my brother should have limited the sum."

"I'm glad you realize that he's worth your trust. I only wish we could do something. By the way,

have you noticed this note scrawled on the back. It's in pencil."

"No. I didn't look on the back of the letter. Let me see." She read the penciled note. It ran: "At present I'm in my yacht, *The Vision,* and I'm cruising about among the Western Islands."

"That is the most valuable part of the letter," said Colonel Jackson.

"I don't see that it helps us much."

"Yes, it does. If we can get in touch with Jeremy,—but we can't. Look here, let me worry this out, will you? Keep in touch. I'll ring you up at once if I have any news."

When Olivia got back to the flat, she found a visitor awaiting her. It was Mr. Josiah Polkins, the millionaire American who had rented Pulldan.

"Well, now! That's good," he said when he saw her. "I'm very pleased to see you again. You're just the one who can help me. Where's Lord Amlett?"

"I'm sorry, he's away."

"Could you switch me on to him? You'd be doing your daily act of kindness if you could. It'd be real helpful."

"Sorry again," said Olivia. "But really and truly I can't help."

It was obvious to the American that she was keeping something back. But it was equally obvious that he couldn't intrude. He was very sensitive about tact, far more sensitive while in England than he would have been at home, perhaps. He had been warned that English people considered Americans to be tactless, blundering bone-

heads, and he was not taking any risks. He liked English people, and he wanted to stand well with them.

"Sorry to trouble you. Don't bother. Perhaps you could help me in another way. Could you locate Lady Dorothy for me? I called at the Hall, but they said she had left and gone to London."

"She usually stays at Claridges, I believe. You might try her there."

"I'm rather an admirer of Lady Dorothy," said Polkins. "She and I had a bit of a yarn at Pulldan when first I went there. I liked her style. I'm a bit lonely at Pulldan now, and I thought I'd look up my friends."

"You can count me in, if you care to," said Olivia.

"Now that's real sporting of you. Why, do you know, before I came across I was told that the only ice water I'd see over here, would be in the welcome I got from the old families! That's the sort of dish-water that's served out over there about English people. Everybody's been very kind; his lordship was charming, and Lady Dorothy was very friendly, and you, you might as well be an American! I mean it."

"That's a real compliment," she smiled.

"Perhaps you would care to stay for lunch? We could walk a little in the park. I am really quite free this morning. Then we could come back here for lunch?"

"That's fine. I'd be only too happy. I'd like to see your park."

Olivia took the enthusiastic American to the zoo, and he was duly impressed. They were crossing to the Mappin terraces, when without any warning they came upon Lady Dorothy and Alec Shane sitting on a bench in the shade of a pergola.

"Lady Dorothy, by all that's wonderful!" said Polkins, before Olivia could stop him. "I'm delighted to see you. I was only just begging Miss Arthurton to give me your address. I would have got it from Lord Amlett himself, but it seems he is away."

"Now the cat's among the pigeons," thought Olivia.

"What's that you say, sir?" said Shane.

"Mr. Polkins, this is Mr. Shane; Mr. Shane, Mr. Polkins," said Olivia pointedly.

"Glad to meet you," said Shane. "Did you say Lord Amlett is away?"

"I did. There's nothing surprisingly remarkable in that, is there?" said Polkins. "Have I dropped a brick?"

"Only half a one!" said Olivia, laughing. "Don't worry. There's nothing to worry about. Yes, he's gone away. You'll see the announcement in the *Times* to-morrow morning."

Polkins drifted aside with Lady Dorothy. She was telling him with some zest that the very latest idea in the zoo was to have a baboon park in the open. She told him about the aquarium and its new wonders.

"You should come to America. That's the place for new ideas," said Polkins. "That's the place where a mind like yours would find its real home

town. Your mind is too new for London. There's no room over here. Mind you, I like English people. They're real honest-to-God worthwhiles, but —there's nothing like America. Why don't you come?"

"I will," said Lady Dorothy. "I should like to."

"Then you can bet your boots that it's as my guest you'll come. Look here, most people coming over to the States see the Statue of Liberty and the Woolworth Building and perhaps Greenwich Village, and the thirty-ninth floor of a skyscraper, and think they've seen the biggest thing God's allowed on this earth. But you'd want to see the real thing. I'd take you down Kentucky way, and show you real aristocracy and fineness you'd never had a thought was even connected with America."

She let him ramble on. He was happy and she didn't mind. He appealed to her. He was new, violently, extravagantly new and, she thought, sincere.

Shane was trying to get information out of Olivia.

"Where's he gone to?"

"I don't know. It's not exactly my business."

"Am I my brother's keeper, eh? I should have thought you would know. Oh, dash it all, Olivia, don't let us quarrel again."

"I'm not quarreling. I'm perfectly willing to be friends. Not that I have forgotten your rather unpleasant behavior last time we met."

He flushed. "I apologize," he said. "I ask you to forget that."

"Willingly. We'll think no more about it."

"But seriously, Olivia, why don't you tell me where he has gone to?"

"Because I don't know."

"Honestly?"

"I mean what I say."

"Perhaps you don't realize how important it is. To me, I mean. Perhaps to you too."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"I can't go into that now. When did he go?"

"Last night."

"Left no message?"

"Only an announcement for the *Times* that he was leaving London for an indefinite period. It will be in to-morrow."

"Can't be helped. To think that I missed him by so little! Never mind. Let's talk of something else. Who is your American friend?"

"He's rented Pulldan Castle. He's a good sort."

"Don't like Americans," said Shane briefly.

"That's because you don't know any of them!"

"No, it isn't. I've been to America, lived there. I know 'em, and don't like 'em. Any of 'em."

"Why so violent about it?"

"I'm not violent."

"You may not be aware of the fact, but you are really rather rude."

"I apologize again, Olivia. Hang it all, I don't want to keep on offending you. I only want one thing. I want you to marry me. There, I've asked you again, though I swore I wouldn't."

"And I swore I wouldn't let you. I'm sorry. But please understand. It's quite hopeless. It

was never more hopeless than it is at this minute. I would rather you did not think about it. I appreciate the honor. But I can't. Really I can't. So please be friends. And be sensible."

But he was not taking it well. He was angry, conscious that he had made a fool of himself in rushing in just at that moment. Moreover, he knew it was hopeless, and his own pride should have held him back.

"Good-by," he said, and held out his hand. "Make my apologies to Lady Dorothy and to Mr. Polkins for me. I'm going. I can't stand any more of this."

He hurried off, and she watched him, wondering. How much did he know? How much did he suspect? Still it was no use worrying. She could do nothing to help or hinder.

A curious situation now arose. She had asked Polkins to lunch. He was keen on having Lady Dorothy's company. The least she could do was to gratify that wish, and to ask Lady Dorothy to lunch with them. To her surprise, the invitation was accepted.

They all three walked back together.

"There's been a telephone call for you, my lady," said Willett, "from Colonel Jackson. He asked me to tell you he'd found his lordship and that he expected he would be back here to-night."

"Oh!" said Olivia. "Splendid." Immediately the question entered her head. Had Lady Dorothy heard Willett deliver the message? She had been very near. Better make no mystery of it.

"Willett tells me that my brother will be back

to-night," she said. "If you care to stay in town, Mr. Polkins, you would meet him."

"I'd be very glad to."

"His indefinite absence turns out to be a very short one then?" said Lady Dorothy.

"I hope so. I was anxious for him to come back. There is some rather urgent business for him to attend to."

The tracing of Jeremy to the pleasant place of Cowfont had really been a very simple affair. Ballan was the prime mover in the business. Ballan knew Jeremy through and through. He had been in many a tight corner with him during the war, and he got to know him as only men do who have faced dirt and disease, death and discomfort together for long periods. He had been watching the flat when Jeremy left. He had caught sight of Jeremy's expression. He had seen that something was very seriously up. It was the expression of a man driven into a corner and tried beyond endurance. He had followed him, on the Underground, down to Charing Cross, had heard him ask for a single ticket to Cowfont. At first he had thought of following him there, but he decided it was no part of his business. He reported to Colonel Jackson soon after Olivia had left him in the morning, heard himself congratulated as a really sensible fellow, and found himself packed off by the first available train to Cowfont. He struck the Three Bellows before it was open for custom, and went down to the private door.

"Excuse me, but have you a party by the name of Laytree staying here?"

"No," said Mrs. Hart. "There's no one staying here."

"Pity," said Ballan. "I've come all the way from London with an urgent message for him. Is there anywhere else he'd be staying?"

"There's no where else in this village he could stay."

"Um. That's torn it. Well, thank you very much, ma'am, for your courtesy. Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me the nearest place he might stay, being a stranger and arriving fairly late?"

"He could only stay here," said Mrs. Hart, softening to Ballan's manner. "What was your business with him?"

"Well, you see, I was his batman in the War, and I've a very important message for him from his old Colonel. I'd like him to get it this morning, too."

"You're a friend of his then?"

"Well. I can't say about that. You see, he was my officer. It's not exactly like friends. But I'd boil myself in lime-juice if I thought it'd do him any good."

"You've got an honest face," said Mrs. Hart. "If you were to go up to that big house—the Cedars they call it—you'd most likely find him there. He was here last night. But old Mr. Weathers sent the trap for him early this morning, and he's gone up there."

"I'm much obliged, ma'am," said Ballan raising his hat.

"Perhaps you'd like a glass of ale?" she suggested.

"Well, I never say no to that. Thank you very kindly."

Ballan pushed on up to the Cedars. It looked an enormous place, but golly, what a state the grounds were in! The place by daylight was a wilderness. Indeed, when Jeremy had seen it for the first time that morning, he had realized that it really was work that he would like to do, that old Weathers was offering him.

All unconscious of Ballan's approach, he was sitting now in the study with the old man and Dibdin Weathers.

"You can live here," Weathers was saying, "or if you please to build yourself a house later on, you can have the meadows across the brook."

"You're embarrassingly generous, sir."

"Don't talk rot," said old Weathers. "I've got a couple of thousand or more acres. I offer you seven hundred and fifty pounds a year to look after them. And I offer you ten of them if you care to settle down and build a house for yourself. That's not generosity. It's sound horse sense. You get a house and land, I know. But I get a man who'll look after my interests. This place is a damned disgrace. I know that. Somebody's got to do the work. You do it and I'll pay you well for it, and be only too happy to be doing something for old Bulger's son."

"I'd advise you to accept it, Laytree," said Dibdin Weathers. "It's not a chance that comes

every day. There are thousands of poor devils who went through the war with us who can't find anything at all. Why, I found one of my old regiment playing a barrel-organ in the Strand the other day. He's got a wife and one kiddie. They're in the farm over the bridge now, and he's so grateful for the first sign of a helping hand he's ever seen, that I hardly like going down that way now."

"It's not that," said Jeremy. "It is that I don't feel able to accept so much."

"Be damned to that for a tale," said old Weathers. "You're not accepting a favor. You're doing me a favor. If I wanted to put this place in the market as it is, what do you think I'd get for it? A few paltry thousands. Why the place could be a gold mine! It'll be your job to make it into one."

"It'll cost a lot of money," said Jeremy.

"How much should you think?"

"Not all at once of course, but I should think you ought to spend at least five thousand pounds on it in the next five years."

"What should I get for my five thousand?"

"You'd get clean fields properly drained. You'd get proper fences and gates. You'd have a really good orchard, which would in time pay very handsomely. You'd have some good beasts, properly housed. You'd have your timber thinned out, and fresh timber planted for screening. The place could be made a gem. You're sheltered from the north wind. And—though this is a fad of my own—you could grow roses on a large scale."

"You've got the ideas. That's the way I like to hear a man talk. You can see the place as it's going to be. Is it a deal?"

"It's a deal, sir," said Jeremy, "and I promise you that if I have anything to do with it you'll never regret it."

"That's settled, then," said old Weathers, "d'you want a contract?"

"Good gracious, no," said Jeremy.

"Then you shall have one whether you like it or not. Get it all down in black and white. Best for both sides. See?"

"All right," said Jeremy. "I'm quite willing."

"Dibbie, take him and show him round a bit. Let him know the worst. I'll draw up some sort of a contract and you can sign it as witness when you come back. Lunch is at one."

The old man, conscious of having done a good stroke of business combined with a rather fine humane act, chuckled to himself with delight as he watched the two men out.

"He looks on you as a sort of younger son," said Dibdin. "He talked about you for hours last night. He was really anxious lest you should refuse. This place worries him. It's more like an agricultural dustbin than an estate."

"I'm not much younger than you, am I?" said Jeremy.

"I look younger than I am," said Dibdin. "Science keeps a man young. It's so impersonal. I could give you fifteen years easily!"

"You surprise me. I wondered though. Your father seems very old."

"He's nearly seventy. I say, is that some one waving to us. Over there?"

"There certainly is some one over there," said Jeremy. "And he's waving. Oh! damn!"

"What's the matter?"

"That's a man I particularly did not want to see. I'm very fond of him, but I would rather he hadn't found me like this."

"Am I in the way?"

"Not a bit. But I say, Weathers. I don't know what this man may have to say to me. It may be bad news. But I ask you to believe me, when I tell you that whatever happens, I am just as straight as you think me. There is an explanation of why I arrived down here without any apparent reason. It's a very complete and final explanation. But it's not my story and I'm not at liberty to tell it. Some day you shall know all about that. But not just now, because I'm not free to say anything yet."

"That's all right. I don't make up my mind about people on scraps and odd bits of information," said Weathers. "You see my research work makes me jolly careful about any sort of evidence. Besides, I've watched you pretty carefully with the old Dad. You'll do."

"Thanks," said Jeremy. "That means a whole heap to me.

"Hello, Ballan. What do you want me for?"

"Got a letter for you, sir. From the Colonel."

"Anything happening? How the devil did you know I was here?"

"Will you please read the letter, sir. Colonel Jackson said it was very urgent."

There were two letters. One was the letter from the real Lord Amlett. The other was a curt note from Colonel Jackson.

"DEAR LAYTREE:

Take my advice and come back. Your only chance of avoiding unpleasantness is to get hold of Lord Amlett. The sooner the better.

Yours,

L. F. JACKSON."

So the long arm fetched him back to his task. He was not to be allowed to settle down in peace and quietness to work out his own salvation. He had to leave Cowfont to go back and take up his horrible task where he left it off, until he had accomplished it. There was no escape.

"I'm sorry," he said to Weathers. "I've got to go back to London at once."

"There's a train in half an hour. You could catch that."

"But your father. I wouldn't like to seem rude to him."

"I'll explain all that. Let us know when to expect you down again. We'll have everything ready by then. We can sign the contract and make a start."

"Cheerio!" said Jeremy, "and thank you for all you have done. If I don't come back at all—and it is just possible—you know that it won't be my fault."

"Are you sure I can't help? It's no money difficulty? If it is, for the Lord's sake don't stand on ceremony. Money is such a paltry thing if we

can't use it to help the people we care about. It has no other meaning."

"No. It's not a money difficulty. Money only comes in as a side issue. I'm like a dog that has trodden on a thorn. I've got to go back and have it out. Good-by, and thank you."

He took the road to the station with a heavy heart. He was leaving the peace and promise of Cowfont to go back to the smoky restlessness of London, to the unquiet hazards of an unsolved problem.

"What a life!" he said.

CHAPTER XV

JEREMY and Ballan missed the train. As they watched it disappear Jeremy turned to his old batman.

"Superstitious, Ballan?"

"No, sir."

"Now, if I were superstitious, I might believe that I was intended to miss that train. I might stop down here. And I'd very much like to stop. I don't believe any one could find me. It'd be like finding a black man in a coal cellar."

"I found you, sir."

"Ah! but you're different."

"Don't you make any mistake, sir. If the people at the Yard wanted to find you, they'd do it."

Ballan had been impressed by the Yard. He was impressed by the importance of his own intimate contact with one of the big chiefs. He, like Jeremy, had found a place in the world, and he was already adapting himself to the new necessities. It was up to him to uphold the efficiency of the department to which he was attached. At the present moment his loyalty to Jeremy was able to run parallel with his loyalty to what was to be his new job. He did not like to think what the position might be if his loyalty to his job should run counter to his loyalty to Jeremy.

"You'd made a rotten Sherlock Holmes, Ballan," said Jeremy.

"Yes, sir. But all the same, I think you'd better catch the next train up. If the Yard were to want you, your photograph and description would be in every police station throughout the country inside a week. It would be in every newspaper. Your face would give you away."

"My face was to have been my fortune, Ballan; but it's got me into the devil of a mess."

"Yes, sir. But it's not hopeless. Leave it to Colonel Jackson."

"Um. But you and Colonel Jackson serve that one-eyed goddess with a sword and a pair of scales. You call her 'Justice,' and you really mean the Law. A very distant relation. Branch of another family altogether. Supposing that one part of the infernal machine which you and he represent starts to work, could either you or he stop it? You know you couldn't."

"That's why he wants you to come back, sir."

"I was going to be very happy here," said Jeremy. "I could have done good work. If I go back, I risk bringing about the very scandal I have tried to avoid. If it all comes out in the courts, I won't be able to face old Weathers again."

"You know you've got to see it through, sir," said Ballan. "It's no use grousing."

"No. I suppose not. But I can't be expected to sing 'Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!' just because you take me back to place my nose in close contact with the same old grindstone."

But he caught the afternoon train for all that. Olivia, to whom he had wired, met him at the station.

"What happened to the checks in that letter?" he asked.

"I paid them into my bank, made out for the full amount, and I prevailed upon the manager to cash five of them. I've got the money here. It may come in useful."

"May? My dear, if we were not in the public eye of Charing Cross, I could kiss you for those words. If we are going to retrieve your errant brother, we will have to spend money like water. That's the best news I've heard."

"What are your plans?"

"Well, Jackson says find Lord Amlett. If he's in Scotland and in a yacht, the obvious thing to do is to go up there after him."

"But Scotland is a big place."

"Yes; but we can get to Knollburgh, make enquiries there, and surely some of the people on the coast will have heard of his beastly yacht."

"It seems the only thing to do. You can't get a train before midnight. We'd better go and book a sleeper for you now."

"We can do that by telephone from the flat. Let's go up there. I've come back now, and I may as well go the whole hog. By the way, Ballan!"

"Yes, sir," said Ballan, who was waiting for orders.

"You might go round to the Yard and tell Colonel Jackson we've gone up to the flat. Ask him whether he will come up there some time to-day. Better dine with us and discuss difficulties."

"Yes, sir. I beg your pardon, sir. May I ask a question?"

"Yes. Go on."

"Now you've come back, are you Mr. Laytree, sir, or Lord Amlett, my lord?"

"I'd better be Lord Amlett, I suppose. It may be my last appearance on any stage, but I've got to do it."

"Polkins was at the flat," said Olivia when Ballan had gone, and they were in the taxi on the way home.

"The deuce he was. What's he doing in town?"

"He came down to see Lord Amlett—you, in fact. He had lost Lady Dorothy! He wanted her address. I took him out in the park, and we ran into her. I had them both to the flat to lunch. It was rather comic."

"They've gone now, I hope?"

"Oh, yes. But Polkins will be back this evening. He likes you, apparently. I think he's taken Lady Dorothy to a *thé dansant* this afternoon. I believe he dances rather well."

"Do you think . . . or is it too good to be true . . will he make an impression?"

"On Lady Dorothy? I shouldn't think so. After all, her pride has been badly mauled, you know."

"Yes. I'm afraid tact is not my strong point."

There was silence between them for a while. She was thinking of Lady Dorothy's misfortunes, while Jeremy, though he also thought of the lady, was mainly concerned in putting the wind up himself as to what he should do if he met her again.

Now that he was actually back in London, in the very heart of the confusing tangle he himself had spun, he regretted more deeply than ever the peace and promise of Cowfont. That episode shone like the daylight seen from a tunnel, and as he went steadily deeper into the tunnel its brightness faded; the details seemed to disappear; it grew smaller and smaller until he felt that the slightest turn in his affairs would hide it forever.

"A penny for your thoughts?" said Olivia, as the car came to a stop in a traffic block.

"Hand it over," said Jeremy.

"Here you are." She gave him a penny.

"That's for luck," said Jeremy. "I wanted to tell you all about everything anyway. If we ever get out of the mess we're in—and it seems doubtful—I can see quite a new life opening for me. I'm not going back to Africa. Not unless I'm forced to."

She did not answer, but she was listening carefully, anxiously almost.

"When I came back to England I was an outsider—in the sense that no one knew me. My own identity mattered so little that I was able to take over that of another man, lock, stock and barrel. I made an unholy hash of it, I know; but that doesn't make any difference. When I ran away—and I may as well be honest, I ran away from you as much as from everything else,—I had no hope of the future. I dropped into that little place, Cowfont, by sheer miracle. I met a man there who knew my dad. As a matter of fact, I think it must have been my granddad he knew, because

he's very old. But he knew my family. He placed me. He knew something about me. Can you see what I'm getting at?"

"I don't know," she whispered.

"I suppose I attach too much importance to it, but his recognition of my place in the scheme of things was like nothing on earth. I felt bucked up. Like you feel when you first see your name in the *Gazette*. It seemed to make Jeremy Laytree, Esquire, into a real person."

"I begin to see."

"Well, now, this new Jeremy Laytree has been offered a thundering good job on the Weathers' estate. The place looks as though some one had beamed upon it for a fortnight with the Evil Eye. My little job is to make it blossom like the rose. And I can do it. Now, Jeremy Laytree, Esquire—if he ever finally emerges from the shell of Lord Amlett—is to run that estate: further, he is to take over a nice little park of his own: further, he is to build a house. With a house, and land and real work to do, he should be fairly content, eh?"

"I should think so."

"D'you remember a long time ago when a certain young man met a certain young woman riding in the woods in the early morning?"

"I do."

"He kissed her if I remember rightly?"

"Jeremy, if you kiss me now in the middle of all this traffic, I'll scream!"

"That's all right. If you did they wouldn't hear you. Here goes. What I mean is this. That having achieved some sort of real identity, I have

much pleasure in again offering you my hand and heart. In other words, Olivia, will you marry the new Jeremy?"

"Of course I will. You know that. But you're not Jeremy now. You're Lord Amlett again."

"I'd forgotten that. I'm going on forgetting until we reach the flat."

"Don't be absurd. What if any one should see you."

"I feel as though I don't care a hoot who sees me. But I'll be good. *Soyez Sage.* I'll live up to the family motto."

"Jeremy," she said softly, putting her hand over his. "There's something I want to say to you. I would never have thought of it but for Colonel Jackson. It's about the lady in green."

"Yes?"

"I think you ought to know that Willett told me she was in the flat with you when you told that awful whopper about being at the Savoy. Wait a moment. I know that you ran away after seeing her. I'm not asking any questions. I don't want to know anything about it. But I just wanted you to know that I knew."

"But what has Colonel Jackson to do with it?"

"He suggested at first, when I spoke about it, that I might be jealous. He knows better now. I'm not. And I thought you would like to know that I'm not."

"Olivia, you're a brick. You really are. But I can tell you this, there is nothing to be jealous of. I do know who the woman is, or who she says she is, and it was because of her that I decided to go

away. But I can't tell you anything more. It's not my business. I've had nothing to do with her, and before I went to Pulldan I had never seen her. But she may yet wreck the apple cart. Thank you for telling me. I don't think we shall see her before Saturday night. By that time we shall be in Scotland."

"It is something about Arthur?"

"Don't ask me any questions, there's a dear. I can't say anything about it. You see, one of the many reasons I went away was just this—that I can't give you the full confidence I know you give me. Anything I find out while I'm supposed to be another man is not my property, even if he is your brother. I want to be quite open about it. To my mind, if we're ever to make anything of our lives together, if we ever get the chance, that is the first principle. I believe there must be nothing hidden. And when that time comes, I'm going to propose to you all over again!"

"That will be three times," said Olivia with a glad smile. "The answer will be the same every time!"

"You darling!"

They had not been in the flat more than an hour when Mrs. Mainterly called. She was the woman at whose house Jeremy had made his first appearance as Arthur Arthurton. When he heard the voice, he fled.

"Take her away," he whispered to Olivia. "Tell her I'm out of town and not expected back. Go with her if you must. Take her to a night club and leave her there. But I can't face her just

now. She's not in this act and I'm not equal to it."

Olivia did not wish to offend the worthy Mrs. Mainterly. She suffered herself to be carried off to tea in the Mainterlys' car, and Jeremy was left to his own devices.

He began to pack some clothes for the Scotch adventure. Willett came in.

"Mr. Polkins is in the study, my lord."

"Tell him I'll be down in a minute, will you?"

"Lord Amlett, I'm real pleased to shake hands with you again," said Polkins when Jeremy went down to him. "I've taken a great liberty I know; but your sister said I could blow along and as Lady Dorothy was with me, I persuaded her to come along too!"

"You seem to be the center of the stage," said Lady Dorothy. "We met Shane in town. He seemed to be very busy. But when he heard you were coming back to-night, he said he wanted to see you. He's calling round too. Quite a little party!"

"Sorry Olivia's out," murmured Jeremy.

"I'm sure you are," said Lady Dorothy with faint emphasis. "It is such a help, isn't it, to have a sister to do the honors!"

"She's pulling my leg," thought Jeremy. "Ugh, how I hate it, too."

"I'm surprised to find you a bachelor, you know," said Polkins. "I was kind of figuring it out with Lady Dorothy here. Here you've got everything a man could want, a real sealed pattern copper-

bottomed title, a Castle, and all the money you need. Why, in America, there's hundreds would fall for you."

"I dare say," said Jeremy uncomfortably. "But you know a man can't always do just what he pleases."

"But what's to stop you? It seems kind of wrong to find you in a bachelor outfit. I hope you'll pardon me if I'm too personal . . . perhaps I've dropped another brick?"

"I daresay if Lord Amlett chose, he could marry soon enough," said Lady Dorothy, secretly delighted at the opportunity to roast Jeremy a little more.

"Well, I'd like to oblige you both," said Jeremy, "and perhaps some day I will. You shall both have the opportunity of coming to the wedding—if any."

"Fine!" said Polkins. "And if you take my tip, you'll spend the honeymoon in America."

"If Mr. Polkins had his way, every one would go to America," said Lady Dorothy. "Already he has asked me to go over there as his guest."

"Ah, yes?"

"But she won't say 'Yes.' Not yet. I hope to persuade her. She's promised. But one of those promises that sounds like a pious hope."

"If you'll excuse me a moment, I'll go and give orders to Willett about dinner. You'll stay to dinner?"

"Delighted," said Polkins. Lady Dorothy assented with a faint smile. This dinner party promised to be amusing.

The incomparable Willett rose to the occasion, and repaired to Olio's, where he ordered dinner for six to be sent in, complete with waiters. It was nothing new to Willett. Arthurton's bachelor dinner parties had always been arranged in just that way, regardless of expense, but with the minimum of trouble.

Alec Shane turned up just before dinner, and Colonel Jackson arrived with Olivia soon afterwards.

"You are the limit," said Olivia. "I no sooner turn my back than you invite a whole dinner party. Don't forget we're going to Scotland to-night."

"Don't mention it, whatever you do."

"Not for worlds."

Olivia took the head of the table with Colonel Jackson on her right. Lady Dorothy came next and then Jeremy. Shane was on his left, with Polkins between him and Olivia.

The dinner was perfect.

"I must say," said Shane, "that for a bachelor you do yourself pretty well."

"This is by way of a miraculous draught of fishes," said Jeremy. "Willett arranges everything."

"What's he got all these people here for?" whispered Colonel Jackson to Olivia under cover of the general conversation.

"He couldn't help it."

"He ought to have helped it."

"Do you often give dinner parties on the spur of the moment like this?" asked Polkins.

"No, not exactly often."

"Only when he's feeling particularly reckless," said Lady Dorothy.

"I don't get you?" said Polkins.

"There's not much to get," said Lady Dorothy. "I only meant that perhaps Lord Amlett wanted a little diversion! Besides, he has seen next to nothing of his friends lately." Still that mocking smile, delighting in his discomfiture.

"By the way, have you any idea how long you're going to stay at Pulldan, sir?" This was Shane fishing for information from Polkins.

"I don't rightly know. But if his lordship wants to come back at any moment, he's welcome. I'd let up my lease, for I sure feel that I had no right to go there at all."

"I'm very glad to see you there," said Jeremy. "Please keep the flag flying. Pulldan's too big for me."

"Well, to tell you the truth, it frightens me not a little," said the American. "I reckon I came up to London because I was lonely. Now I've a proposition to make to the company. What's the matter with a jolly little house party at Pulldan? I'd be very happy if you'd all come back to Pulldan with me as my guests. There'll be shooting soon, and nobody knows better than Lord Amlett there whether it's first-class or not. What's the voting? Lady Dorothy, will you come to Pulldan next week?"

"I shall be delighted," said Lady Dorothy, watching Jeremy's face. The dinner party itself was a nightmare to him. It was sheer high farce, with all the laughter hidden away. The only per-

son there whose impulses were open, genuine and above board, was Polkins. All the others knew bits of the story. One knew one piece, another knew another: he himself believed he knew it all. The conversation was like the laughter of fools, the crackling of thorns under a pot. The thought of continuing the horror indefinitely at Pulldan was so perfectly ghastly that for one wild moment he thought of blowing the whole filmy structure to pieces there and then.

Shane had accepted. Colonel Jackson had said that he would do his best to get down there for the week-end.

"And you, Miss Arthurton?"

"I'm afraid not," said Olivia. "I can't manage it just now."

There was a chorus of protest.

"But think—"

"Pulldan just now is at its best. All friends together, we could have a really jolly time."

"I reckon Lady Dorothy would fix me up with a couple more ladies," said Polkins. "We could have a dance. And if his lordship was there, perhaps we could get some of the County people. We could have a real slap-up ball."

Polkins was thinking of the glory which would redound to his credit if only he could give a ball in an English family Castle; if he could have the County there, a handful of titles and the real people of the English aristocracy. That would be a triumph.

"I'm afraid it's impossible," said Jeremy. "I have to leave town to-night, and I'm not at all sure

when I shall be back. I think Pulldan could do with a decent house party. It's about as cheerful as the Albert Hall just now. But you'd better count me out. Don't let that stop you from having your party though."

"It would be rather fun," urged Lady Dorothy. "I'm sorry you are going away again. We haven't seen very much of you lately."

"As a matter of fact, Olivia and I are both leaving town to-night. I may say that if we should return soon, and your invitation is still open, we shall be only too happy to accept, eh, Olivia?"

"It would be jolly to dance at Pulldan again," she said.

"That's capital," said Polkins. "I'll go back there to-morrow and begin to get things going."

The faces round the table were a study. Colonel Jackson, who had been very silent all the evening, was puzzled and uncertain. He was invited too. None of this fitted into his military conception of how the thing should be run. He had sent for Jeremy, intending that he should set off at once for Scotland. To his way of thinking, Jeremy ought to have set off at once. It was a mere quibble that the best train happened to be at midnight. If he had cleared out at once, all these chattering fools wouldn't be sitting there eating an expensive meal and complicating the problem beyond hope. Now they were actually talking about house parties at Pulldan! It was all too jolly dangerous to be amusing. Choose your line of action, go straight at it, drive success home like a nail hammered into a board—that was the way. He had come to see

Jeremy, to say something of this sort to him, to stiffen up his resolution, and so far had not had any opportunity of speaking to him.

Lady Dorothy was smiling, but it was not a happy smile. There was scorn and bitterness in it, scorn for herself and bitterness arising from the certainty that she was seeing Jeremy Laytree, the imitation Lord Amlett, for the last time. She was convinced in her own mind that he and Olivia were running away together. She had failed, and she hated herself.

Both Olivia and Jeremy looked uneasy, uncomfortable, uncertain as to what new complication might ensue to trip them up. Only Shane looked perfectly satisfied. There was a smile hovering about his mouth most of the time, a smile that seemed to come from somewhere deep within him. Something amused him, and the uncanny part of it was that it was something that was not there.

"What time do you go to-night?" said Lady Dorothy.

"We leave here at eleven," said Jeremy.

"Do you remember once we had a dance here?" she went on. "He's got the most heavenly gramophone, and the floor in the study is perfect. Can we have a dance now? Before you go. Be a sport and say yes."

There was something in her manner which puzzled Jeremy. She seemed more excited than usual; her voice was strangely insistent.

"Yes; let's dance, then," he agreed. Anything was better than talking. Willett cleared the study with the aid of the waiters. Coffee and liqueurs

were placed on a side table, and the gramophone set going with "Chili Bom Bom." Polkins claimed Lady Dorothy, and Shane took Olivia.

Jeremy stood by the gramophone with Colonel Jackson.

"You're a silly ass, you know," said Jackson in an undertone.

"Don't blame me. Blame my rotten luck," said Jeremy. "I wish to Heaven I'd stopped down at Cowfont."

"I was afraid at dinner that you were going to give yourself away. Take my advice and clear this lot out before it's too late."

"I can't show them the door exactly."

"Well, if you can't, don't neglect to leave London as you said to-night. You're going to Scotland, I suppose?"

"We are. And we're not coming back until he's found. If we can't find him, I'm going to quit altogether."

"You're wise."

They had no more time for conversation. Jeremy had to dance with Lady Dorothy. It was worse than he had expected.

"So you're going," she said, as they drifted round.

"Yes."

"I shall not see you again?"

"I don't know."

"Tell me where you are going."

"You know I can't."

"I think you were marvelous to-night. You

know what I think of you. I haven't changed really. I can't change. I've tried to. But it won't happen."

"Please, please," said Jeremy. "Don't make it impossible for me. I want you to know that I'd have done anything rather than all this should have happened. But it's too late now."

"It's always too late," she sighed. "But I've not lost hope yet. I could have made you happy —if you hadn't been such a fool," she added bitterly.

"Then it's good-by this time, really?"

"Damn you. . . . No man . . ." For a second he thought she was going to break down, but she recovered herself. "It's silly to care as much as that!" she said cynically. "Nothing's worth it. Thank you for a very pleasant dance!"

She left him, and soon was waltzing with Shane. Jeremy had at last managed to get hold of Olivia. They were in the middle of the dance when he became conscious of Willett at the door, trying to catch his eye. He handed Olivia over to Colonel Jackson, excused himself and went out.

"What is it, Willett?"

"There's a man downstairs, my lord. Says he must see you."

"Tell him to go away. I can't see any men offhand like that."

"He's very insistent, my lord. Says it's urgent."

"Tell him to come again in the morning."

"I did, my lord."

"Well?"

"He said it wasn't good enough, my lord."

"Wasn't good enough? What the devil does the fellow mean?"

"I don't think he'll go away, my lord, unless you see him."

"Ah! What's to stop you taking him by the slack of his breeches and throwing him into the street? If you don't do it, I will."

"Begging your pardon, my lord, but I don't think that would help. You see—"

"Look here, what's the matter with you, Willett? What's all the mystery about. It's your job to get rid of people who make themselves a nuisance. Get on with it, and don't bother me."

"But, my lord, he's a detective!"

"The devil he is!"

From the room he had just left Jeremy could hear the strains of "What'll I Do?" and the ironical aptness of that popular melody roused a smile, even though he knew that he was in a tight corner.

"I've known detectives pitched out by the scruff of the neck before now, Willett. Still, I suppose we must respect the majesty of the law. Where is this representative of the forces of law and order?"

"Downstairs, sir."

"Have him up into the dining-room."

Jeremy looked at his visitor. He was obviously a detective, an official detective too. Through the outward layer of civilian clothes, one seemed to catch the faint elusive ghost of a policeman. His face was stamped with that indefinable expression of disbelief, of tolerant skepticism that marks the

servant of the law, whether he be policeman, detective, solicitor, judge or law-lord.

They all have it. It puts the normal man at an immediate disadvantage; it makes the most honest, truthful tale sound futile and silly; it acts like acid on the most transparently honest motives. No disguise will cloak it. No clothes will hide it.

The man waited for Jeremy to speak first.

"Well, what do you want?"

"You are Lord Amlett?"

"Yes. And I am very busy. Tell me your business quickly."

"It's a matter of a check, my lord."

"Ah, yes? What check?"

"I've been trying to get in touch with you all day, my lord. I apologize for the lateness of the hour."

"Get on with it."

"The man we had watching the flat couldn't find me when you returned."

"Watching the flat, eh? What next?"

Jeremy didn't feel at all comfortable.

"Well, about this check, my lord. Made payable to Alec Shane. Signed A. Arthurton. That's your signature, my lord?"

"Yes, well?"

"I am instructed that the Bank say it's a forgery, my lord!"

CHAPTER XVI

"WHAT are you going to do about it?" said Jeremy, looking at the check as though he were seeing it for the first time.

"Forgery's a pretty serious business, my lord."

"I suppose it is. But who does the prosecuting? If this is a forgery, it's up to me to start proceedings, isn't it?"

"Well, it doesn't matter who starts 'em, my lord. Whether it's the bank or a third party. It's all the same. It's got to be put a stop to."

"You couldn't have come at a more awkward time, you know," said Jeremy. "I'm giving a sort of party. Can't you come back to-morrow morning?"

"I suppose I could. But you see they wanted me to make sure first what you said about it. Is that your signature or not?"

Jeremy looked carefully at the signature once more. As a matter of fact he knew what it looked like without seeing it. He had dreamed too often about the check he had given Alec Shane. Shane was on the other side of that door now, dancing with Olivia, perhaps. He would only be too pleased to find Jeremy in this new difficulty. As Jeremy thought of the affair, and of the curious behavior of Shane all along, he became more and more convinced that not only did he know of the affair but that he was prime mover in it. Shane had started this game with the check.

"Oh, yes!" said Jeremy. "The Bank doesn't

know what it's talking about. I wrote that. I remember the occasion. We were in the gun-room at Pulldan. Shane was hard up. I wrote the check there and then."

Jeremy could see from the detective's face that he was puzzled. "But the Bank?"

"I can't help the bank's chuckleheadedness," said Jeremy. "They must answer for that. That's my fist all right. I wrote that check. What is more I'm prepared to meet it with cash any time you like."

"And of course you're Lord Amlett," said the man absently.

"Willett!" called Jeremy. "Just ask Colonel Jackson to spare a moment, will you?"

"Colonel, here's one of your people getting rattled about something. He's brought me a check which the bank say is a forgery of my signature, and which I recognize as mine. I think your friend here would like some sort of proof of my identity. After all, it's only natural. We haven't been introduced." Then turning to the detective he said: "I suppose you know Colonel Jackson, C.I.D.?"

"Yes, my lord," said the detective, now beginning to wonder whether some one hadn't made a most awful howler. Colonel Jackson, C.I.D., was one of the big nobs. If he was there, why it was quite safe in his hands.

"I'm sorry to intrude, sir," said the detective.

"That's all right, Miggs," said Colonel Jackson. "His lordship quite understands. Come and see me in my room to-morrow morning. I may have something rather interesting for you. I should

drop this for to-night anyway. It seems clear the Bank has made a mistake. Never do to detain his lordship for forging his own check, eh? Ha!"

The very thought of such a thing made Miggs' blood run cold. He didn't care a row of beans whether Lord Amlett was arrested or not; his only interest in the case was as a possible pathway to promotion. Promotion depended not upon the amount of publicity received by the case, but upon the exact degree of tact, common sense and initiative displayed in handling awkward situations. If he made himself the laughing stock of the evening papers and the departments, there would be no promotion. It was out of his hands now. Colonel Jackson had assumed full responsibility and Miggs was fully determined that he should stand to it if the time came.

As he left the building, he began to wonder whether he had done rightly. It was all very well for Colonel Jackson to accept responsibility. But he didn't know everything. After all, he wasn't Sherlock Holmes exactly. There might be more in this case than met the eye. It was surprising what a lot could be got out of a case by sticking to it. Miggs crossed to where his watcher stood.

"Come back at midnight for orders," said Miggs. "I'll take over for a while. Anything to report?"

"No, sir. It's all quiet. Horribly quiet. The only amusement I've had is listening to two Tom Moggies. And that's not very cheerful." As became a man with his eyes set on the golden future, Miggs took no notice of this attempt at facetious-

ness. "Good night, sir," said the watcher. "Good night," said Miggs.

The street grew quiet; from the distant Finchley Road, Miggs could hear the heavy roar of the 'buses. From the lighted window above him came the thin gibbering echoes of the gramophone. Miggs in his private hours of leisure played the flute, and despised gramophones, but to-night he was glad of the sound. It told him that the party was still going on, and that he could give his full attention to other aspects of the problem. The slightest mistake now, and his promotion was done for. Curious how all his future life depended on the small insignificant things he might do here on this particular night alone in the quiet street. Detective Inspector Miggs felt very small, very ignorant and very helpless.

He heard footsteps approaching. From a house close by he heard a clock striking the half-hour. It was half past ten. The footsteps came nearer, and as they passed through the pool of light round the lamp-post at the corner, Miggs saw the figure of a woman. He kept silent and still in the shadow of a jutting corner of the Mews which he had chosen for his vigil. The woman seemed to be keeping watch too. She was looking up at the window from which the sound of the gramophone came. Miggs thought at first it was merely curiosity. Then she moved a little, walked a few steps, and came to a standstill within a few feet of him.

It is very difficult to be casual in such a situation. If Miggs made a noise, he would have to give

some sort of explanation of his presence. If he didn't make a noise, he would probably be spotted in any case. She might even make for the shelter of the same shadowed corner! It would be too ridiculous.

"Ahem!" said Miggs discreetly.

The woman turned quickly.

"Who's there?"

"It's all right, my dear," said Miggs, who after one glance at her face had decided exactly the type of woman with whom he had to deal. "It's very late for you to be out, isn't it?"

"D'you think so?" said the woman in green. "I'm out on business. So are you, by the look of you? You're a policeman, ain't you?"

Miggs was furious at that. He cherished a secret hope that he didn't look like a policeman. He was of course quite wrong.

"No, I'm not," he said shortly.

"Don't be offended," said the woman in green quickly, placing her hand on his arm. "Are you watching that flat up there? Where the lighted window is? Where they're dancing?" She performed a few sketchy steps in the shadowed court. She had been drinking, thought Miggs.

"You're a gay spark, not half, you are," he said, somberly watching her. "What's your game exactly?"

"What's yours?"

"You don't suppose I spread my business about all over the place, do you?" said Miggs. "Why should I tell it to you?"

"Two heads are better than one," she laughed.

"What's your name? I'm sure it's Charlie? Tell me, isn't it Charlie?"

"As a matter of fact, it is."

"Well, look here, Charlie. I know something about a certain cove up there. It may be the cove you're watching. It probably is. I can help you. You can help me. We can both help one another. See, Charlie?"

"What's your game then?"

"Oh, dearie me. You don't suppose I go about telling my game to everybody I meet. I don't think I like you, Charlie. Good night."

"Come here! Stop. You can't go away like that."

"Oh, yes, I can," she mocked.

"I could have you arrested as a suspicious person," said Miggs.

"You'd have to catch me first," she laughed at him. "I should just run, and you dare not blow your whistle for fear of attracting the attention of the people in the flat up there. You may as well be friends! Good-by, Charlie." She blew him a kiss.

He made a sudden dash at her, caught her wrist, drew her to him, and held her. She nestled against him like a soft, warm bird, and her pale eyelids closed, their long lashes fluttering against her cheek.

"What's your other name, Charlie?"

"Charles Miggs," he said, fetching a deep sigh.

"Is there a Mrs. Miggs?"

"No," said Charlie.

"I thought not."

"Why?"

She laughed softly. "You'd hold me differently if there were."

Miggs had never met any one like this before. She was devastating. He wasn't quite sure what he ought to do. True, it was very flattering. She was beautiful. She was well-dressed, and though he thought he knew her type, he had to confess she was like no other woman he had ever known.

"Listen, Charlie—" she went on. He was still holding her close to him. "I'll tell you why you are watching that house. You're watching for Lord Amlett. Not because he's wanted by the police. Oh, dear, no! Nothing so vulgar as that. Look at me, Charlie!"

She bent her head back and looked full into the face of the bewildered Miggs. Suddenly he leaned over and kissed her violently. . . . "That was very nice, Charlie," she said at last. "I appreciated it. Now let me go. You don't need to hold me so tight. Tell me what you want Lord Amlett for?"

"I don't want him. It's the bank. There's some trouble about a check."

"Ah! forged, I suppose?"

"Yes. How do you know?"

"Be quiet. I know far more than you'd think, Charlie. If you want me to be nice to you, you'd better be frank about it all."

"I've seen Lord Amlett to-night. He says the check is his. There's no forgery. I can't very well do anything on that, can I?"

"Wait a moment," said the woman in green, pushing him back into the shadow. "There

goes one of the party. Don't let him see you!"

It was Colonel Jackson returning home. He had left first with the idea of beginning to break up the party. He wanted to see Laytree well out of the way at the earliest possible moment. It was clear that the situation was crystallizing very swiftly and would soon be impossible. When that happened it was better that Jeremy and Olivia should both be out of the way. But the party showed no signs of breaking up.

"We're sorry you're going," said Lady Dorothy. "But as it's the last time, let's all dance it out to the end. Then we'll all come to the station with you and see you off."

"That's a good idea," said Polkins, who alone of the party had thoroughly and completely enjoyed himself. "We could have supper at the Metropole afterwards, and make a night of it."

"I'd prefer you not to come to the station," said Jeremy. "You'd be wise to go straight to the Metropole."

"I suppose you're traveling incognito?" said Shane, sarcastically.

"Yes," said Jeremy. "I don't suppose they'll bother to turn out the guard when I arrive."

Down in the shadowed Mews the woman in green still cuddled closely up to Charlie.

"Of course he said the check was his. That doesn't make it any the less a forgery."

"Are you barmy or am I?" said Charlie.

"Charlie, don't be vulgar. Use your brains. Can't you see? It's so very easy."

"Dashed if I can."

"Why have men such hopeless imaginations? Look how I had to encourage you before you would even kiss me! And even now you can't see the obvious solution. That's not Lord Amlett at all! He's an impostor. He's an impersonator. Goodness knows what he has done with the real Lord Amlett! Nobody knows. But since he appeared on the scene, the old Lord Amlett died very suddenly, his elder brother came to grief in a motor accident, and this beauty took over the title."

"Here, hold hard," said Miggs, suddenly catching a glimpse of a fabulous career stretching away into the golden future. "Hold hard, let's get this right."

"It's all quite right. You see, I know Lord Amlett. I'll tell you why." She put her lips close to his ear, as though to whisper some intimate secret, but she changed her mind. Charlie Miggs understood her as well as if she had spoken volumes. After all he was proud of being a man of the world. It was curious how one came in contact with the underworld of London, and how helpful it was. Here was this woman, appearing from nowhere, who clearly knew more about this case than any one else. Rum business. Pretty woman, too! He'd want to see her again after it was all over. He, Charlie Miggs, had made an impression. He felt big, important; the flattery in which the woman dealt had its way with him. He saw himself promoted, honored, famous. He alone had ferreted out all the information. He alone knew

that the supposed Lord Amlett was no lord at all, that he had forged a check, and that for all he knew there might be worse things against him. As his own self-importance swelled within him, his attitude towards the soft-voiced, too friendly woman altered.

"You'll have to leave this to me," he said brusquely. "This is a man's job."

"Charlie! It's not going to be dangerous?"

"It may be," said Miggs. "But don't you worry about that. And I want to see you when it's over. I'd like to keep in touch with you."

"Would you really like to see me again, Charlie?"

"Yes, I would," he admitted, moved from his perch of semi-official arrogance by the subtle tone of flattery in her voice.

"But, my Charlie, my clever Charlie. You don't expect me to give you my address, do you? I'll meet you anywhere you like. In fact, I'll call for you at the Station if you wish!"

"For God's sake, don't do any such thing," said Charlie in terror.

"There, then, it's all right," she answered. "I'll meet you here then to-morrow night?"

"Look out, the light's gone out!"

"What are you going to do, Charlie dear?"

Armed with the new information Miggs was trying to make up his mind to risk it. He knew, he felt in his bones, that the woman's story was true. If he could bring this off he was a made man. She clung to him, hanging on his arm. "What are you going to do, Charlie?"

Charlie spotted a lonely policeman on his beat approaching them. He stopped him, told him to hang about within call, and then with the woman in green on his arm, he went into the block of flats.

"You can't come in here again," said Willett.

"Oh, yes, I can," said Miggs. "I've a police officer down below, and I want to see his lordship." Miggs knew that he had no right to force his way in there, but he wanted to fluster Willett so that he would let him in voluntarily.

He succeeded in doing so, and he and the woman entered the hall together.

"I'll tell his lordship," said Willett. He hurried away not liking the look of things at all.

"He's come back, my lord," said Willett to Jeremy, whom he found with the others in the dining-room. It was close on eleven o'clock, and Jeremy and Olivia were saying good-by to their too friendly guests. There seemed to be a conspiracy to prevent them from leaving, and Polkins, ignorant of what was going on, simply based his behavior on that of Alec Shane and stayed. Finally Jeremy had said: "I must really go now. If you like you can stay on and dance. Just as you please. Willett will get you anything you want." Then Willett appeared.

"Who's come back?"

"That man, my lord. The . . . er . . . detective!"

"Ah!" said Jeremy. "Tell him I'm coming."

Jeremy knew then the game was up. The de-

tective would not have come back without some very awkward and compelling reason. If he could get out of the house now, and make for Scotland, he might yet find Lord Amlett in time to prevent a scandal. This confounded detective stood in the way. There was Olivia to be considered. He had done everything to avoid involving her. He was ready to take even bigger risks yet. He wouldn't go without a last final struggle. He motioned to Polkins. "Just a moment, Polkins," he said.

"Can I help?" said Shane.

"No, thanks," said Jeremy dryly. "Not just now."

"Look here, Polkins," said Jeremy, when they were outside the door. "I'm in rather a bad corner. There may be a rough-house. If there is, are you ready to stand by me?"

"I would just love it," said Polkins.

"Don't believe anything you hear in the next hour or two. But if a rough-house starts, get close to me and watch this detective chap. If he tries to blow a whistle or call for help, just put him quietly out of harm's way if you can."

"Count me in," said Polkins. "This is a peach of a party. I'm really enjoying myself."

"Go steady, Willett," said Jeremy to his man. "Keep close to me. There may be a row. Get on the telephone to Colonel Jackson. He's gone to the Hyde Park Hotel for the night. Ask him to come back here at once."

"Yes, my lord."

"Now for the detective. You'd better show him in."

"With the others, my lord?"

"Yes. We may as well have it out."

Jeremy and Polkins went back to the dining-room.

"What is it?" whispered Olivia.

"Don't worry," said Jeremy. "Are you all ready to go?"

"Yes."

"We may have to go in a hurry. There's a car at the door waiting. When I give the tip, make for the door whatever is happening."

"Mr. Miggs," announced Willett, throwing open the door. Mr. Charles Miggs entered, followed, to Jeremy's horror, by the lady in green.

An amazed silence settled down on the room. Lady Dorothy looked at this curious new visitor with surprise and hostility. Shane was puzzled; Polkins, not knowing any of the story, but only conscious of the promise of a rough-house, moved carelessly round until he was between Miggs and the door.

"Well, Mr. Miggs," said Jeremy, "who is your friend in green? Please introduce me."

"I don't think you need any introduction, do you?" said Miggs.

"Don't take any notice of Charlie," said the woman in green. "He's quite a dear really, but he's not very clever. He would come in here and make a scene. I told him not to."

"That was very good of you," said Jeremy, "but I think that some explanation is owing. What does all this mean?"

"Perhaps Mr. Shane will oblige?" said Miggs,

who had caught sight of Alec Shane at the other side of the room.

"Ah!" said Jeremy. "So you're in this too, are you, Shane?"

"Yes, I am," said Shane. "Very much in it. Are you going to brazen the whole thing out? You say some explanation is owing. Can you give an explanation? You know you can't."

"An explanation of what, Mr. Shane?" asked Olivia. "Why should Arthur explain anything to you? Or to any one?"

"Excuse me . . ." said Miggs.

"Sorry, Miggs," said Shane. "But you'd better know who everybody is. It may be important. This is Miss Olivia Arthurton, Lord Amlett's sister. This is Mr. Josiah Polkins, an American, who rented Pulldan Castle. I think you know the rest of us."

"Now that Mr. Shane has so kindly taken on the duties of host in my flat," said Jeremy, "perhaps he would kindly explain who the lady in green really is? Or perhaps Charlie will explain?"

"Don't worry about me," said the lady in green. "I'm all right."

"Stop this fooling," said Miggs in an angry tone. "I tell you this is a serious matter. Can I see you alone?"

"No," said Jeremy. "You can't. That's flat."

"Right then. I'd better warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you. You understand that?"

"You're not going to arrest him?" asked Lady Dorothy.

"It's about this check. Mr. Shane, do you remember this check?"

"I do. It was given to me by this man here."

"And the Bank pronounce it to be a forgery."

"They do."

"We've heard all this before," said Jeremy. "I don't see any point in going through it all again."

"Don't you?" said Shane angrily. Jeremy had moved nearer to Alec Shane. He didn't like the look in the man's eyes.

"No, I don't. Unless it does you some good?"

"It'll do me a lot of good," said Shane. "It'll help me clean up an unsavory business. It'll help me to see the last of a common swindler, who took advantage of another man's absence to get into the good graces of that man's sister, who—"

He did not say any more. Jeremy stung to fury at the eleventh hour failure of his plans, angry beyond words at Shane's attitude, and conscious that all his sacrifices had gone for nothing, leaned forward and hit Shane full on the point of the chin! He went down like a bag of coals, but was up again in an instant. He was taller, bigger, heavier than Jeremy, and in a second the dining-room looked like a bear garden.

Charlie Miggs, at the first sign of violence, had clapped his hand to his pocket for his whistle. But he found himself taken care of by Jos Polkins, who enwrapped him in a benevolent jiujitsu grip that left him powerless to move.

CHAPTER XVII

FOR less than two minutes a spectacular fight of unusual brilliance raged in the flat. Olivia turned away frightened, powerless to help. Not so Lady Dorothy. Her eyes shone, and her face showed more real emotion than Olivia had ever seen there before.

"Isn't he wonderful?" she breathed, her hands clasped together in semi-religious ecstasy, as Jeremy clinched with Alec Shane for the last time, and they both went down together in the corner. Shane caught at a book shelf as he fell, Jeremy clutched a curtain. Bookshelf, curtains, a choice selection of vases, a large bowl of late roses, and two or three metal ash trays came to the ground together with the battling men.

The crash was terrific, stunning. The room was completely and beautifully wrecked. Chairs were strewn about, the table was thrust up into one corner, a picture, one of the real Lord Amlett's valued sporting prints, hung beautifully and deliriously askew, imparting an air of rakish debauch to the scene.

The woman in green looked up at Lady Dorothy and smiled inscrutably. "If you go down the East End, you'll see as much as you like of that kind of thing. But it's not admired. They don't imagine anything about the cave woman stunt down there. Besides, you don't suppose those two men are fighting for us, do you?"

Perhaps of all the slights Lady Dorothy received she liked that one least. Not that she would admit it. She merely smiled a pitying, understanding smile which made the woman in green furious and then turned her back on her.

From out of the chaos and wreckage in the corner, Jeremy lifted a berumpled tousled head. He stood up and, offering his hand to Alec Shane, helped him to his feet.

"I'm quite ready to be friends, Shane. But you've got to leave Olivia's name out of it."

Shane grinned as well as a split lip would permit him.

"All right, er—?"

"My name's Laytree," said Jeremy in answer to the unspoken question. "Jeremy Laytree!"

"Ah!"

There was the sound of a coöperative communal sigh, as each member of that mixed company received that open confession. It meant different things to all of them, and they were silent together as each wondered in his mind what effect the open admission of the secret would have on his or her plans.

"Polkins, don't hold that unfortunate man any longer. If he'll give his word not to blow his whistle, I'd like to say one or two things?"

"Say, friend, are you ready to lie quiet?" said Polkins. "You've no option really. Better hook on."

"Oh, I hook on," said Charlie Miggs.

"Good old Charlie," murmured the woman in green softly.

"What about a drink?" said Shane. "You jolly near choked me."

"Willett? Bring something wet."

"Beg pardon, my lord, the taxi's waiting."

"Tell it to wait, Willett. Take the driver a cigar."

Olivia crossed the room to Jeremy. "Don't cut it too fine," she said. "Remember we've to catch the midnight train."

"Don't worry, darling. I've changed my mind. I'm going to see it through."

"Charge your glasses," said Jeremy, when Willett had brought in the something wet. "I'm going to ask you to drink to the health of the absent Lord Amlett. I don't know where he is. But he is not here. On the other hand he knows that I am here. He asked me to stay here. He put me in charge. He wanted to go away, and I thought I could carry it out without being detected. I was caught out the first day. I don't think any one in this room has ever believed in me thoroughly?"

They smiled at one another as though to say, "Of course we knew all the time. It was so very obvious!"

"I'd like to know just how far your suspicion did go. Had you any suspicions, Shane?"

"I was uneasy, but I had no idea of the truth. I played that check trick on you as a test. It was the Bank that made up my mind for me. I believed that only I knew, and that you were feathering your nest and worse. I set the police moving, because I thought there was something fishy going on."

"What about me?" said Charlie Miggs. "It's all very fine for you gentlemen to settle the case like this, but what about me?"

"That's all right, Charlie. There won't be any case now. You've been had. As I've been had. As they've all been had." This was from the woman in green, who was happy enough in the corner with a double whisky and soda. It was her third already, and Willett's eyes were beginning to come out of his head when she motioned to him to refill her glass. She took the center of the disorderly room.

"You're all wondering what I'm doing here?" she said in bitter challenge. Her dark veiled eyes peered out from the half-closed lashes. She held her glass in her hand. "Give me a cigarette, Jeremy," she went on. "I think Jeremy is a much more suitable name than Lord Amlett. Ha! Nothing like Lord Amlett and never was! I know Lord Amlett too well to be taken in."

"Hadn't you better be quiet?" said Jeremy.

"No! I'm not going to be quiet. I'm going to spill my words of wisdom."

"Who is this unfortunate woman?" whispered Olivia. "Can't we stop her? She'll say something horrible next."

"Let her say it, dear," said Jeremy. "Let her say all she has to say. This thing has got to such a pitch that it's no use hiding anything any longer. I've nursed so many things we mustn't say, that I've got moral indigestion. We're going to let the daylight in now."

"This is all very irregular, I warn you," put in Charlie Miggs.

"Delightfully irregular, Charlie," said the lady in green. "But not so irregular perhaps as a little scene over in the Mews about an hour ago, eh?"

The immediate wilting of Detective Inspector Charles Miggs was one of the most remarkable incidents of that remarkable evening. He seemed to shrivel up into himself. He realized with dreadful certainty the effect on himself and his own prospects if this extraordinary woman should ever get into a witness box and tell in her own way the story of how she persuaded Charlie to take her with him into the flat.

"I'm going to tell the whole story from the beginning," said the lady in green, looking round the silent ring of faces, and enjoying the dramatic satisfaction of holding her audience. "My name is Alice Holt. I was an actress. I . . ." Her voice trailed off into silence. An expression of bewilderment came over her face, changing to one almost of fear. Her eyes were fixed on the door as though she had seen a ghost.

"What's the matter?" said Jeremy. "Are you feeling ill?" Then he looked towards the door.

There in the doorway, smiling but puzzled at the wreck of his flat, stood the real Lord Amlett!

"Arthur!" cried Olivia, and ran to him. "At last."

He held her in his arms for a while, and said nothing. Behind him Jeremy caught sight of Colonel Jackson, who had come from his hotel in response to the telephone message.

Amlett closed the door behind him, released Olivia and came forward into the room. He stopped in front of the lady in green for a moment. Then his eyes traveled to Lady Dorothy, to Shane, to Polkins, to the detective, Charles Miggs, and then to the extraordinary scene of chaos in which this unexpected meeting was staged.

No one spoke.

Finally he looked at Jeremy, and there was a faint smile about the corners of his mouth.

"I thought I advised you not to have visitors," he said.

"Yes, er—well, you see . . ."

"You seem to have made the most ghastly mess possible of everything. What are all these people doing here?"

"Better ask 'em?" said Jeremy. "Dashed if I know."

"I only returned to-day," said Lord Amlett. "I only heard to-night of what has happened. Shane, what's the matter with your chin?"

"Why?"

"It's bleeding!"

"I cut myself shaving," said Shane, and Jeremy, Olivia and Polkins howled with sudden laughter at the idea.

"And as for you," said Lord Amlett, turning suddenly to the woman in green, "what do you mean by it?"

"I'm sorry. I'll go. I'll go now."

"No. You won't. We've got to clean this up first. What's this woman doing here?" he said to Jeremy.

"She came here the other day and said she was Lady Amlett!" said Jeremy.

"And you believed her?"

"Not exactly. But I wasn't to know what wild oats you had been sowing in your misspent youth. I only cursed you pretty strongly for not having warned me. You see, if she was Lady Amlett it was pretty clear I couldn't be Lord Amlett. Anyway, she fixed a time limit. And I beat it while the gate was open. Then they dragged me back, and I ran into this rough-house. They tried to arrest me for forgery a little while back, and at midnight Olivia and I were to catch the midnight express for Scotland to look for you."

"She said she was Lady Amlett, did she? And strictly speaking you were fool enough to believe her?"

"Well, if it comes to that, how did you know her?"

"She came to me here before I went away and said that she was an old flame of Philip's."

"Looks like blackmail to me," said Charlie Miggs, making a slight movement towards the woman in green.

"You be quiet," said Jeremy. And then to Lord Amlett, "And you believed her?"

"What else could I do? She had some of his letters. She threatened to expose him. She said she was married to him. I gave her money, because it seemed to satisfy her. I didn't want a scandal."

"My hat!" said Jeremy, turning to the woman

in green. "D'you mean to tell me that it was only money you wanted?"

She smiled at him inscrutably. "It was only money at first," she said softly. "But when you met me, when I saw you, I knew then that it wasn't money at all I wanted. I couldn't mention money. Money's not everything!"

Suddenly she threw up her head and looked round at them all challenging, defiant, hostile.

"Damn you!" she cried. "All of you! You're none of you worth what he is. He's a man anyway. You look down on me. You think I'm a drab. So I am. So I have been. You don't know what it's like being a drab. You don't know what the streets are like. It's all right if you haven't brains. But I had. And it hurt! Hurt like hell. I determined to get money some other way. I tried that way. I'd known Philip Arthurton three years ago. And I knew I could get more money out of him because of his fear of what had happened than I could by drabbing. I got money from both of them. Fooled 'em both. Then this man came. Jeremy! It was all different. I watched him, and I knew he wasn't Arthur Arthurton. I knew there was some game on. I got in touch with him at last. Here, in this very flat." Her voice softened. "I've not met men like him before. He was kind to me. He knew that if what I said was true, the game was up. But he treated me well. He didn't believe me. He could see that the drab was still there. But he gave no sign that he'd seen it. He acted straight."

Save for the bitter challenge of the woman's

words there was silence. Jeremy, conscious of how near he had been to shipwreck, half amazed at the sudden appearance of Lord Amlett, felt suddenly very tired. The room and all the figures in it seemed unreal, like fantastic dream figures, while from the back of his mind arose a vision of the quiet peace of Cowfont under the stars. As in a dream he heard the woman say: "I offered him all I had. All there was to give. If he had taken it I would have kept quiet. But he put me aside. Gently. Kindly. With a laugh so that I wasn't hurt. That's the kind of man he is. I'm not ashamed I love him. And because I love him, I'll tell you something else. I never married Philip Arthurton. I've no claim on him at all. There are his letters."

She threw them on the table.

"Burn them if you like. I never want to see them again. I never want to see any of you again. . . . I'm going. . . . Let me pass."

Tears were streaming down her face as she brushed past them and reached the door. She stopped there, turned and faced them.

"Good-by, Jeremy," she said, "and good luck!"

Then she looked at Miggs and smiled.

"Good-by, Charlie! Better luck—next time."

He moved forward to intercept her, but the door banged in his face.

It was Jos Polkins who broke the silence which followed her departure.

"Shake, Mr. Laytree," he said, offering his hand. "Apart from the outstanding fact that this is the finest party I've ever been one of, I'm proud to

know you. A man who can get a kind word and a certificate of merit from a female whirlwind like that young woman is a man to watch. He's going to do big things. I'm proud to know you, sir. If you'd like to live the simple life for a bit, you'll accept my invitation and come to America. We can't offer you anything like the same excitement; we're a quiet-living people; but I think we could interest you."

"Thanks," said Jeremy. "I hope to come some day."

"And to you, my lord," said Polkins, "I can only say that any time you want to take up residence in Pulldan, you're welcome."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I'd better explain this," said Jeremy. "There's a lot to explain."

"But what I want to know is what about this check?" put in Miggs. "I've got a constable waiting down below for orders. He can't wait all night."

"And what about me?" said Lady Dorothy. "It seems to me that you're forgetting me."

Jeremy groaned. This was the most awkward moment of all.

"To tell the truth," he began, "there are a good many surprises waiting for you, Amlett. I'd better break the first one first. Owing to the stress of circumstances over which I had no control, I've broken off your engagement with Lady Dorothy."

There was an awkward pause. Jeremy kicked himself for having brought such a delicate subject

up at all. It was Lady Dorothy herself who broke the rapidly forming ice.

"It's all right, Arthur. Don't look so much like a frightened kitten. Our engagement is broken off. He did it. That's all there is to say about it. I'm quite content to leave it there for the moment. We can talk it over later, if you wish."

"The second thing is," went on Jeremy before Lord Amlett could say anything, "that I signed a check for five hundred pounds for Shane here. He wanted the money. He said you owed it to him. You had left me with practically nothing. Owing again to circumstances, I was forced to pay up. It's the only check I've signed. There are no other money complications."

"Let's see that check," said Lord Amlett.

Miggs handed it for inspection. Amlett took the check and the bundle of love letters from the table and thrust them both in the fire.

"That's that," he said grimly. "Anything else?"

"The third thing is that I've let Pulldan Castle furnished to Mr. Polkins here. But he's quite ready to give up his lease."

"Carry on, Polkins," said Amlett. "That's a minor detail."

"The fourth is that all the servants at Pulldan have given notice, but now that you've come back, they'll probably be only too glad to stay on."

"Go on. You seem to have been enjoying yourself."

"The last thing, and to my mind the most im-

portant, is that Olivia and I are engaged to be married. We should hate to get married without your consent, and we hope that you'll make no difficulties about it."

"Bless you, my children, or any other words to that effect you prefer," said Lord Amlett. "Send me a piece of the wedding cake, and if I'm not too busy straightening out the colossal mess you seem to have made of everything you have touched, I'll come along to the wedding. As for you, Miggs, I understand that as the evidence is now destroyed, and Mr. Shane withdraws the charge, you will have no difficulty in withdrawing the case?"

"That will be all right," said Colonel Jackson. "I'll look after that. Miggs, you'd better come to my room to-morrow morning. You are wasted on work like this. I'll find you a better job. Something without any women in it."

"Yes, sir," said Miggs. "Anything else, sir?"

"No, not to-night. You may go."

"I think I'll go too!" said Shane. He offered his hand to Jeremy. "I wish you luck, Laytree. I'm sorry about what's happened. But I believed you were a wrong 'un. If you'd only told me, I'd have helped you. Anyway, good luck."

"Cheerio!" said Jeremy, "and many thanks. There's some iodine somewhere about for that chin if you like."

"Mr. Laytree," said Polkins, "good-by. I hope you'll think about my offer to come to America; it's going to be worth your while."

"I'm going to bed," announced Olivia. "I'm sleeping here. And I'm tired out. Good night,

Jeremy. Good night, Arthur. Good night, Dorothy. Till to-morrow!"

"I'm going to beat it," said Jeremy. "I feel as though I'd just come up for the third time, and found I wasn't drowned. Good night, everybody."

Lady Dorothy and Lord Amlett were left together. She looked at him curiously, wondering what attitude he would adopt towards her. He paced to and fro, choosing his words, wondering himself what to say. At last he faced her.

"Dorothy," he began at last, "I'm going to be frank."

"I prefer it," she answered.

"I think we both know now that we have made a mistake. Isn't that right?"

"It is. Dreadfully right."

"Laytree has broken off our engagement. That, of course, doesn't count. We are still engaged. I'm going to offer you your freedom. You must not think too hardly of me, but . . . there's no getting beyond the facts. I watched you while Laytree was speaking. You care for him far more than you ever cared for me. . . . It's no use pretending."

"You need not apologize, Arthur. I offer you your freedom, too. Let it be mutual. You're wrong about Laytree. Never mind. I'm not going to argue about it. It's not worth it. I'm going abroad again. Soon. And perhaps I shan't come back. We part friends?"

"I hope so. Thank you. You always were a brick."

"Ask Willett to get a car for me, will you?"

There were no more words between them and she left him at last alone in the wrecked room.

"I suppose it's all right," he said, puzzling over what had happened. He picked up a chair and set it upon its legs. Then he crossed the room and with a quizzical smile set the rakishly hanging sporting print straight upon its cord.

"There'll be a deuce of a job straightening all this out," he murmured.

CHAPTER XVIII

LORD AMLETT, the real Lord Amlett, the genuine descendant of the Amlett family, sat upon the edge of the dressing-table in Olivia's bedroom.

"My dear kid," he said, "you might jolly well get up. It's not as though there isn't lots to do."

"Here, have an apple"—she threw him one across the room—"and don't grouse. There may be lots to do, but we're not going to do it. You think that you're the center of the proceedings. You may be, my dear, but Jeremy and I are thinking otherwise. He's going to take me down into the country!"

"The deuce he is," said Lord Amlett, "and what about me? What about all the accounts, and the mess there is to clear up?"

"You didn't give him much help, did you?" she asked, smiling. "You just went off and left him to it."

"Tell the truth, kid. I was terrified out of my life of Dorothy. I could feel it in my bones she'd make me marry her. So I ran."

"She won't marry you now," said Olivia.

"Now how do you know that?"

"Guessed it. A pretty good guess too, eh?"

"I suppose it's because you're full up to here of your precious Jeremy Laytree. That's what makes

you so quick. I suppose if he comes, I'll show him up, eh?"

"You do!" she said, gathering the bedclothes round her in mock terror. "I'd never forgive you. You have my permission to retire, monsieur. Her ladyship is going to rise from her couch."

Amlett fell into the game, raised her fingers delicately to his lips, kissed them, and then bowed his way out.

"Laytree is a lucky devil," he grumbled. "The kid's worth twenty of him. And all I get out of it is a broken engagement!"

Jeremy was waiting for him in the study.

"Ah! Good morning, Amlett. Here's something of yours." He plumped down a large envelope containing close on three thousand pounds in cash. "I never used it. Hadn't time."

"If I'd sent it sooner, things might have been easier for you. Anyway, it's yours. Now, Laytree —you've earned it; more than earned it. It'll help you on a little.

"Incidentally, I'm going to make you a wedding present in solid cash—not for your sake, you silly ass. For Olivia's sake. I'll make that three thousand up to ten thousand. That will give you some sort of a margin. Olivia will have her own settlement under the will. She'll have about £25,000 I should think. It's up to you to get busy and make the shares equal.

"You're a good sort, Laytree. I'm glad to have met you. Where are you taking my sister?"

Jeremy told him of Cowfont and of the career which was waiting for him there.

"That's the sort of thing," said Amlett. "I'm glad. I was afraid you might want to go back to Africa."

"A week ago," said Jeremy, "I'd have gone to the North Pole or the crater of Vesuvius rather than stop in England. When I saw your unexpected dial at the door, I could have wept on your shoulder."

The clock in the hall struck eleven.

"Hear that? That means port and biscuits!" said Amlett.

"Yes, I know," said Jeremy. "I gathered that much. But you left me to find it out. Here's good health, you blighter, anyway!"

. . . . .

Three years later Jeremy Laytree and his young wife ("she was Olivia Arthurton, you know, sister of Lord Amlett. Oh, yes. He's a viscount. There is some talk in the next honor's list . . .") walked in the grounds of the park they had made for themselves.

Across the lawn, which was patchy but which was improving, came old Weathers on the arm of his son Dibdin.

"Welcome back!" said old Weathers. "It's good to see you again. And how's the house?"

"All as we wanted it, thanks to you," said Olivia. "It is going to be perfect."

She crossed and took the old man's arm. They were close friends. Through the long busy three years of her engagement to Jeremy Laytree, Olivia had grown to look to old Weathers almost as a father. They talked together often when Jeremy

was off riding in some distant part of the estate, superintending draining, or timber felling, or studying the details of some plan for the development of the acres under his control.

In the three years he had been there the place had begun to show signs of a great change. There were no phenomenal alterations. Nature gives back her effects slowly. But it was felt that a capable hand had at last taken control, and because of it, the water began to disappear from the low-lying meadows, the ditches were clear and musical with running water, not stagnant and blocked. The cheery sound of the wood-feller was heard, and across the fields in autumn came the pleasant tang of wood smoke.

Gradually the place began to take shape, to grow, to slip into its place of ordered usefulness and quiet beauty, along with the other ancient houses of the North Weald. The slow but continual improvement was talked about; people saw a wilderness reclaimed before their eyes. The figure of Jeremy Laytree, spare, workmanlike, in well-cut riding kit was known in all the villages. Especially did the women look after him. That rumpled head, that air of wistfulness, and that hidden spark of humor behind those very straight and honest eyes—all qualities very dear both to men and women. But it had soon been seen to be hopeless. When Olivia Arthurton riding a great bay mare swept through the fields at Jeremy's side that first winter, it was a foregone conclusion. It was enough to see them together to know.

And the gossips gossiped, and the smilers smiled, but Jeremy stuck to his idea of a three years' engagement.

"By that time we shall know," he said, "whether I'm going to break this wilderness or it's going to break me. We shall know exactly what we think of one another, and there will be no shocks."

"You're far more careful about it than you were about impersonating that Lord Amlett fellow," old Weathers had said at the time.

"Well, marriage is a serious business, sir. And Olivia agrees with me. After all, if I'd been caught out in that impersonation affair, I might have been put in prison. If he had never returned, it might have been for a long time. But marriage—that's for life! That's more serious than any other step you can take. Because some one else's happiness is mixed up with it. It's two lives, not one."

The wedding had been from Pulldan Castle, and now the two were returning to Cowfont after a honeymoon in Italy.

Jeremy watched his bride on the old man's arm. She looked so young, so frail, and yet so independent. She was not independent any longer. It was his job to care for her. To make her life happy, to shield her from disaster.

That was how he saw it, and he knew that she shared his view.

There were heaps of letters awaiting them. One stood out from the others, because of the fantastic length and color of its envelope. It was a pale chrome yellow, and the address, Jeremy Laytree,

Esq., was written in Chinese ink, very black and startling.

It was from Lady Dorothy, and from Kentucky.

"I hear you have just been married," she said. "My congratulations and my best wishes. I mean these quite sincerely. I think you were right.

"I am staying with the ever-delightful Mr. Polkins. He asks me to marry him at least once every week, and sometimes oftener. I have ideas about it, but they are sketchy and vague. But he is a dear man. Alec Shane went through here the other day. He's shooting bears or something messy in the Rockies.

"When we discussed poetry together once, you amused me beyond words. You wanted to escape from a discussion of present-day poetry. And you said therefore that your taste was going back. When I asked how far back, you said Milton. I am quite convinced you have never read a line of Milton. That is no reason why you should not begin. I am sending you as a wedding present first editions of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. They will perhaps inspire you to start a library. In any case, I'd rather you had them than America. I love this country for its newness, but it's too new for Milton.

"I hope you will come to America to see me before I am forced to sign myself Mrs. Josiah Polkins! How awful!"

"Even her restlessness is amusing," thought Jeremy, "that is, at a distance!"

He and Olivia wandered away down by the stream. They stood for a while on the stone bridge, which had been built there to replace a fallen thing of decayed wood. Already Time was at work coloring the stones, welding the bridge into the color scheme of the wood. It was his

bridge, thought Jeremy, but in time it would be part of the countryside which had welcomed him back and found a place for him.

He took Olivia in his arms. All around was the feeling of growth, the knowledge of change, the consciousness of a million million tiny noises, making up the vast process of life.

"This is our work," he said. "You and I, Olivia. Real, honest-to-God work this time, and two bags full!"

She looked up at him happily.

"I'm glad you're happy about it, Jerry," she said. "It's going to be wonderful to share it with you. To work together. Kiss me, Jerry. I'm very happy."

Together they walked on through their new Paradise.

THE END

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